MOTHER MARY

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HEINRICH MANN

Mother Mary

TRANSLATED BY
WHITTAKER CHAMBERS

NEW YORK MCMXXVIII

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Chapter One

THE President was sitting in the easy chair while the General held down the rocker. Beside the little bronze-inlaid table, the General's wife was sitting bolt upright in an Empire chair to match. The more her nerves threatened to snap under the strain, the more rigid she held herself. Her long pale nose grew sharper still. Whenever the President happened to observe that nose in the course of his rather unpleasant opening remarks, he immediately became more respectful.

With his one eye downcast, the General was rocking and listening to the President. "Your house, your debts, your son . . ." the President was saying. He scowled so ferociously that his glance was lost in a mass of fleshy folds. The General's wife turned away her head as though it bored her. As a matter of fact she was reckoning up the value of their salon.

It had been furnished from odds and ends of the bachelor establishment her husband had fitted out when he was the general-man-

ager for the President, and with remnants of the bronze and marble splendor she had brought him at their marriage. They had already sold everything they could possibly get along without. And of course their idea of what could be dispensed with was gradually growing more inclusive. She knew that well enough. Didn't the room really look barren already?

She heard the President figuring aloud. Behind the glass connecting door at her back, the opening of the grand piano was audible. Soon, she supposed, the Professor would be strumming preludes and the Princess would sing. The General's wife took the opportunity of getting up. The Princess was sitting in the nearly empty music room, lily-pale and brainless as always, on the old wicker sofa whose gilding was almost as faded as its rose silk cushions. She was studying out the notes with her big, vacuous eyes. Her old teacher waited patiently at the piano.

Through the glass door the General's wife made mental note that there was no carpet in the music room. The salon still had its faded Persian which made up for a good many lacks. And besides there was the huge table

in the middle and the four big console mirrors, one on either side of the high portièred garden-door, and two more in the corner niches.

There was nothing more to see in the maze of passages running left and right to the music room and the dining room, so that the wall surfaces of bright yellow silk were all the more effective. The wall coverings were not torn except behind the lounge. It had been pushed there to hide the wall next the garden-door and all the other furniture had been moved in the same direction. The huge bronze and marble table stood alone in the center of the room and really gained in dignity from the wide space around it. "Unless I'm deceiving myself," thought the General's wife.

In the middle of the huge table, a lone figure on its broad surface, stood The Youth, that once celebrated marble that Ina Schollendorff had bought in Hamburg long before she married Captain Veit Vogel von Lambart. As the boy grew up he resembled The Youth. "Unless I'm deceiving myself," thought the General's wife again. She made sure that the portrait of her son which hung

above the lounge really was not like The Youth. "But the picture is ten years old," she thought, "ten years ago he was fifteen like The Youth."

Without holding her head any the less erect, the General's wife sank into thought. For a moment she did not hear what the President was saying. She kept moving about and walked towards the huge table on the left and slowly in the direction of the console glass beside the portièred garden-door. As she moved towards it her life and her person grew clearer to her step by step.

"How my eyes sparkle!" she thought as she looked in the mirror, "though I'm thin now and no longer slender. I'll really have to begin to dress my neck, that famous neck. The President says the house isn't ours any longer and we'll have to get out. Well, he can force us to. He has the connections now and we have none left. But he'll pay the remittance and I'll let rooms somewhere. I still have my bright eyes." She thought all this as she took the first step.

As she came closer to the glass, she went on, "My mouth doesn't matter. I've never liked my thin lips. I never could give them

any expression and there are wrinkles like a spider's web beside them. It makes me look perverse. Imagine me perverse! Valentine has soft wide lips. I suppose he kisses the Princess with them. Fancy my son, a Princess' lover! Her eyes are so big and vacant. The aging woman in this mirror has sparkling eyes yet. I've always been a snob. The Princess is poor, poorer even than we are, and a small nature besides. Of course it gets me nowhere, and yet I want my son to marry her and belong to what was a reigning house seven years ago. It's 1925 already! And this idiocy has lasted for seven years. To think that I came of a wealthy family, that I was once a great lady. 'She's really an aristocrat,' the crown prince said at the maneuvers in 1907 when he learned that I was a Schollendorff. Now I've this old dress left to be put out on the street in along with the rest of our outfit. The President says . . . and still my eyes keep sparkling! How can you keep on sparkling, eyes?"

At the same moment the clock struck. The General's wife started. A glance at the gentlemen told her that they were still on the same sentence at which she had left them. "My day

dream can't have lasted more than a minute," she thought. Was the clock still striking? No, it was the Princess practising the same note over and over again. It sounded high, thin and metallic. It rang out with uncontrolled force. The General's wife felt repelled at the idea of their marriage. At almost the same instant she realized that her son ought to be home. Wasn't it seven o'clock yet? She looked down into the street and started. The mysterious automobile was standing there again!

Its curtains were drawn on her side as usual. It was standing in the customary place at the corner of Behrin Street and Knee Square. The traffic poured across the square in all directions, from Berlin, Hardenberg, Bismarck and March streets. It constantly hid the auto with the drawn shades. The General's wife was never quite sure whether or not she saw a face in it. But she was certain there was a woman sitting there waiting for Valentine. The auto waited there regularly until Valentine came home. It was large and new and exquisitely kept up. The chauffeur bore himself with an air of knowing his business. If it wasn't a woman, who could it be who kept watch daily until Valentine ar-

rived? The General's wife had a struggle to keep from calling her husband.

But no, things of this sort were never mentioned there. Whatever folly Valentine might have got into was best ignored. His parents chose to know nothing about it. Why think about it at all? All sorts of things might keep that dark blue auto waiting there, gambling affairs as well as affairs of the heart. Valentine's life was irregular. That was unfortunately true. But dangerous things, things into which three or four years ago when the end of the world seemed near, he had been drawn, probably by young friends of his own type of mind, . . . no, there was not a trace of that in him now, the General's wife decided. It was a woman this time.

The better to convince herself she recalled the woman she had recently surprised standing in front of their garden-gate peering up. It was early in the morning and only an accident that the General's wife was up. The woman had been standing there in a light spring frock that certainly came from Drecol's. It was the woman in the automobile, of course. Who else could it be? She had on what was certainly a Friedlander hat and

was staring up at the mansard where Valentine slept. How did she know he slept there? Had she been here before? Or had she studied out the lay of the land beforehand like a housebreaker? The General's wife had drawn back the portières and stared at the woman so hard that she felt it and turned her face away from the mansard. She lowered her glance and her features were peculiarly pale and well-formed.

It did not escape the notice of the other woman that the stranger was over thirty. Her eyes were big and dark and might even have been called lovely. When she met the eyes of the General's wife her glance did not falter. It ran from the high sloping roof of the old villa down to its single storey. It passed over the broad façade and returned to the tall garden-gate with its little flight of steps outside. Then the woman turned away but looked about her quietly as though to fix in her mind this neighborhood of modern streets running between country houses of the eighteen sixties. She had walked quickly and with peculiar grace. The General's wife had gazed after her as she vanished around the corner of March Street in the direction of the zoo.

Was she a dancer? Or some extremely well-paid kept woman? Something in her manner made it impossible for the General's wife to see in her son's admirer a lady born, however consoling that might have been. But of course there was that gorgeous automobile in lieu of whatever might be lacking in rank and social standing. One couldn't altogether say that Valentine was throwing himself away. But was it really a woman sitting in the car, after all? And why was Valentine so late? He was supposed to take the Princess to the concert at seven. Without stopping to think, she said aloud to the General, "Valentine is late."

But it was the wrong moment, for her husband was not listening. He had risen from his rocker and was talking to the President.

"So you don't intend to spare me at all?" he said.

"You demand too much," the President said. He got up from his easy chair.

"I? What do I want?" said the General. "All I am asking you to do is to let me live."

"Well, I'm sure I'm no enemy of yours," said the President in a voice that was, however, without a trace of conviction.

Then they both grew silent. The General's

wife knew why. President Seehase had gone too far and was actually a little shocked at himself. But as usual her husband was deeply hurt to think that he should have to defend himself against the sordidness of life. It was that which gave his good eye such an unconvincingly ferocious expression. Out of the tail of her eye, his wife could see the smoked glass monocle with which the General concealed the socket that the bullet had left empty. For the moment he did not lean his head on his right shoulder as he usually did, but stood erect and tall, his round face seeming less soft for a change.

"If he'd always stood like that," thought his wife, "he could have been a chief of staff. But now he's getting gray and it's all over as far as he's concerned. It's the President who gives the orders in this house now."

She walked up to the President. He was blond with a lovely, barely perceptible grayish wave in his hair, very striking in a big business man. In back, of course, the hair was thinner and you could see the shape of the skull. There was quite a bulge in it, again not so bad for a business man.

But that forehead! Nothing but a constantly

changing surface of folding and unfolding flesh, on which the whole tangle of wrinkles twitched towards the left. There they gathered in deep furrows and the eyes appeared. The flesh released the eyes. They stirred within their shadows and, snapping wide open, fixed themselves on the unfortunate General. They met him, steel-blue and hard as translucent stones.

The General took an involuntary step backwards. The President, however, kept his seat until, with a shove of his big, firm hand, he too rose and took two unequal steps. He was lame.

"There's nothing more to say," he said with finality, "and I'm used to spending my time to some purpose." He said goodbye and was about to go, when just at that moment the Princess trilled. In the course of her exercises, she had reached the highest note in her register and even people burdened with business worries could not help hearing her this time.

"Is that the Princess?" the President asked. He leaned forward in order to be able to see through the glass connecting-door from where he was sitting. Perhaps it was the effort of

bending over that made him flush. But he asked suddenly, as though he had something hot in his mouth, "Is she living here now? And does she pay you rent?"

"Our relations are a little too personal for that," the General's wife declared emphatically, "and they are going to be still closer," she went on. "I don't want anything from the Princess."

The President's eyes flew wide open.

"The government may compensate the Princess any day," she said loftily, "and when it does she will be richer than you are, President. There will be time enough then to talk about her rent," she added ironically.

The General felt a sudden desire to cough, and turned his back on them. But his wife faced the President's gaze squarely, although she had lied. There was not the slightest chance of any money materializing for the Princess Adele. The Duke, her father, had no dearer wish than to marry off her older sister, Alexandra, to the Archduke, her cousin. And he had no scruples whatsoever in sacrificing Adele to this design. She would have profited little by a government compensation, even if

her rather thoughtless passion for singing had not already alienated the Duke.

The General's wife trusted that this was the kind of affair which was not familiar to the President of a large corporation, though her court experience made it natural that she should know it.

But the President knew her too well. He kept silent, however, as though taken aback, and let her triumph while he inwardly considered whether it would not be more advisable to seem impressed by the Princess' expectations than by her title. As a matter of fact, he wanted to meet her for the good and simple reason that she was a princess. He was himself surprised at his own weakness, but he merely said, "This opens the way to new business arrangements. Ask the young lady to come here."

"Tell the Princess to come here! That's impossible." The General's wife was determined never to permit such a thing. "Can't you hear that she's practising?" she said.

At that moment the Princess trilled again. They all listened.

"She trills well," the President observed

and, as though that were a reason, added, "I'll wait."

"Do," said the General's wife and they all three resumed their former places.

After a pause, which seemed long only to the General, his wife began again. "My son will soon relieve you," she said. "He's taking the Princess to the concert at seven."

"It's after seven now," the General observed.

"Well, there's some comfort in that anyhow," the President said in a polite voice, for the conversation was becoming flagrantly personal. "Evidently your son's no more punctual at home than he is at my office."

"Why, isn't he punctual there?" the General's wife asked with some misgivings. "What do you suppose he does with his time?"

Instinctively her eyes stole through the heavy curtains towards that automobile. The President, for his part, was leaning forward in his easy chair, peering towards the glass connecting door, behind which the Princess had just emitted a series of bell notes.

"I only hope my son is able to show more interest in your affairs than I was," the General said, rocking himself.

The President let a pause follow the remark. Then he said in a friendly way, "General, if you don't look out you are going to upset that rocker. Our dealings with one another have been so exclusively in office chairs that your return to the rocker only convinces me how much you have had your fill of business," he went on.

The General looked at him indulgently, all feeling of embitterment seeming to be far from him. He even appeared to be mildly amused. It was his wife who broke in.

"Herr Seehase," [1] she said, and paused to let the President enjoy the full flavor of his name, "my husband was a poor business manager, I know, or he would never have sold you this house for the very paper which you yourself were manufacturing in quantities."

"Of course, I had to take my own paper in payment sometimes," the President said coolly. "Or did you think I merely bought up bargains with it? You don't understand business, madam."

"I grew up in one of its transition periods," she said, "and it's true that it wore a different

[1] Seehase—Sea-robin, bloater, a kind of fish.

face then. Even the gentlemen who represented business at that time had different faces."

"Thanks a lot." The President remained polite but his fleshy forehead twitched, and the nervous movement emphasizing the wave in his hair, together with his eyes, which he had narrowed critically, combined to give his face an almost spiritual expression. The General's wife realized her mistake.

"I suppose your firm is practically the only one in our time that has weathered all crises, President," she said.

"Yes, and it will keep on weathering them, never fear," he broke in.

She went on without noticing him, "Well, I admire you for it. Of course, you were no novice. And you were certainly without that blind sort of impetuousness which proved so useful to the younger generation of business men in starting a number of undertakings that we have long since forgotten."

She gestured with her hands, her smile expanding as she listened to her own words. "We admire you," she said again, intending to drag in her husband. But the General only

continued to stare out the window, evasively, it seemed to her.

She grew frightened. This time she had gone too far on the other tack.

The Princess was trilling loudly again. The General turned his chair to face the garden door. Again the President shifted his position in the easy chair in another effort to get a clear view into the next room. The General's wife spoke to arouse him.

"I always prefer to think that it was desperation which made you so ruthless," she said. "I suppose life had already given you your share of reverses. Naturally I don't believe every shady thing I hear, but I daresay you know life. Post-war conditions caught you just at the right moment. Another instant and it would have been too late,—I mean too late with regard to age and perhaps to the confidence of your fellow citizens. . . ."

At that point the President's soul returned from the music-room. His head gave a quick jerk and his metallic blue eyes flew wide apart.

"I always had the confidence of General von Lambart—whom I chose from a flock of candidates," he said. "I seemed to have the

confidence of a good many of the Generals too, all strong to become my general manager."

The General became more than ever interested in the street below. He even got up. Had he, too, finally discovered that automobile? And was he trying to make out the face behind those curtains? His wife kept silent. What she would have answered, the President said himself.

"I grant you that the name of General Vogel von Lambart was very useful to me in building confidence in my business," he said, "and I paid him well for it—for his name, I mean, not for his ability."

The General's wife resumed her conversational tone. "Paid him well, you say?" she asked, "and now that our pension is mortgaged you plan to drive us out of our own house."

"I don't," said the President, using the same tone, "though the firm does to which I am responsible and to which I owe an accounting for everything. But what can I do? We have this plot of ground and we have to build on it."

"You have other plots," she said.

"But not in this locality," he answered, "our main building is right across the way."

"Yes, and it looks like a war horror," she said, "like a tank." It sounded as if the General's wife were delighted with the comparison she had found, but in reality she was numb with terror as she watched her struggle for existence defeated. Suddenly she laughed lightly and sociably.

"It's comical when I stop to think of it," she said. "Here we go on chatting away and it was no longer ago than 1907 that the Crown Prince said to me at Klein-Wendrin. . . . He came to Klein-Wendrin for the maneuvers. That was our estate. That is, it did belong to me and my cousin in Hamburg but he got it all into his own hands during the inflation. It's the oddest thing in the world how my whole fortune, which he was handling for me, shrank to nothing while he himself didn't lose a penny. Comical, comical, these business men!"

"If your own cousin is like that what are you surprised at in strangers?" the President asked. "Every one of us acts according to laws and we couldn't escape them if we were to die

for it. But they're not the laws of the lawyers, nor those we rule our tongues with for politeness' sake."

The General's wife seemed to be choking, presumably on her tears.

"Be so good as to recognize," the President went on, "that I've put your son in a position for which he was certainly never intended and where I keep him only at a weekly loss to the company. I can do it because his job is small and of no particular importance. But, in the case of my general manager, it was necessary for me to sever relations with him when they became unbearable to me."

"To me, you mean, to me," the General suddenly exclaimed over his shoulder. He was obviously reluctant to come closer but he did come, nevertheless. The President stared at him in some surprise.

"I understand that today your business is secure," the General said, conveying his felicitations by a brief and elegant bow. "But, my dear sir, when I first came to you you were floundering around in what my wife calls, a sea of cold despair.' Isn't that the truth?"

"What has been doesn't matter now," said the President.

"Does that go for me, too?" asked the General.

"It goes for everyone."

"Good," said the General, "but it does matter, for all that. No doubt you still remember a certain frontier station in a certain city where you once spent some time. And barracks with 'Bank' or 'Grand Hotel' written on them. Perhaps you recall settling certain accounts with certain public officials, and the blank line dealings of some of your business assistants where you put down any amount you pleased and got the government to foot the bill? How did you manage that, may I ask?

"At the end of the inflation period you got everything in gold without even so much as an investigation. How did you manage that?"

"Are you implying, my dear General, that I used bribes?" the President asked. "Well, I'll let it pass. It may really have been as you say. But the really important question for you to ask is what became of the money which was gained by means, in your opinion so questionable, and with which," and here he raised his voice, "our whole economic fabric was sustained."

"Questionable?" said the General, "I hadn't

any doubts in the matter. I know why I threw over your affairs when I could no longer be responsible for them."

"Responsible," the President echoed, shrugging his shoulders.

But the General had spoken a little too vehemently. A silence ensued in which the President could hear his own heart beating. It no longer beat untroubled.

The General's wife went over to the door that led into the garden. That dark blue automobile was still standing there. Suddenly she grew afraid. It was not for fear of the person in the car, rather it was the anxiety of that person which she seemed to be sharing with her.

It was already half past seven and there was still no sign of Valentine on the busy street. Out there in the car, someone was waiting for him. She herself was waiting at the window. Even in the music-room they had begun to notice that he had not come home yet. It grew quiet in there. Ought she to go in to them? In the end, she decided she had better try to see whether her presence would pacify the two men.

"That money," the President was saying,

quietly, "is now operating an industry which is quite unobjectionable even from your point of view. The Berlin factory alone gives employment to thousands, your own son among them. And this invaluable undertaking, which is absolutely indispensable to our economic life, would be tottering now like all the rest, in fact it would never have been built up at all, but for the money, however it was gotten in the past."

As the General started to say something but remained silent, the President continued, "At that time things were done differently from what they are now," he said. "What you are condemning is circumstances and not individuals. For those same individuals are today strictly correct in their dealings. We now have a veritable aversion to bribery. Besides, it doesn't pay." The President opened his eyes.

"Didn't you consider that a great many things were permissible in persons of your official rank during the War which would not have been permissible in more normal circumstances?" he asked.

The General reddened. It would not have taken much to make him fly off the handle.

"That's not a matter which you can judge," he said. "You know nothing about those circumstances at all."

He looked into the wide open eyes of the President and seemed to be peering into their hidden depths.

"I know you," he said at last.

The eyes drew half closed again. The weight of the world seemed to be resting on the President's forehead. No one would have guessed that his heart was pounding wildly.

"I am a republican," he asserted, not without a certain dignity and strength, "I'm a republican as a captain of industry, for only those governments which are controlled by international trade can offer the world any real prospects of peace or a bearable future. But I'm afraid that you do not know enough about those circumstances to understand this point. Perhaps you will let me end now by saying that I have esteemed your profession beyond most others, General. I never hired you as a subordinate." As he said this he took two steps backwards, limping badly.

The General remained obdurate. "I should never have come to you, Seehase," he said. "You needed me and my position and I sold

my rank to you. It was a treacherous thing to do. Men of my kind should never help men of yours. If only all soldiers had said the same thing, we should have looked calmly on while you were being socialized. You came close enough to it."

The President treated this as a bad joke. "Subversive, eh, General?" he said, "and what about your son, would you like to see him proletarized?" Then he added with a note of regret that was sincere, "After all, no one is grateful to us for having stood our ground against the storm."

He smoothed out the wrinkles from his forehead and bowed to the General's wife who waited for him motionless. He kissed her hand, not without a touch of nobility.

"Be kind enough to give my respects to the Princess," he said. "I don't want to disturb the young artist at her work."

"No, don't do that," she urged; the Princess was practising roulades again.

The President left, his lame foot treading heavily on the carpet.

"Why does he limp?" asked the General's wife. "Did he get it in the War by some good luck?"

Her husband did not answer. Without being aware of what he was doing, he kept pacing up and down the drawing-room. His wife was sitting bolt upright in her chair; she felt exhausted.

"Never again," she thought, "never again will I go through another scene like this! I, Ina Schollendorff! I, once the wife of a ranking officer, and now I am called on to defend all that I have been for a lifetime, everything I have held sacred, yes, sacred, against a Seehase! Better anything than that! Better to steal—like Seehase!"

Behind her the General kept on pacing. She looked up unconscious that her gaze was fixed on the curtained automobile. "Any means are justified," she thought. "We have been too fine but there's a limit to everything. I'll do anything now."

Her breath came in gasps. The General stopped pacing for a moment and they looked at one another with their formal smiles.

"In a way he's right," said the General.

"You must be joking," his wife said.

"Suppose he does disclaim all responsibility for things," the General went on, "we re-

fuse to acknowledge any ourselves. He claims to have done his duty as circumstances compelled and he merely refuses to see the grief that the world has come to as a result of that duty. Well, what about ourselves?"

"Do those two things really seem the same to you, my friend?" she asked. "Can you really compare yourself to Seehase? Did he deign to compare himself to you? He has stolen your place in the world and, instead of justifying him, it might be more to the point if you'd look about for some means to get the better of him."

After a pause she added, with her head held high, "That creature dares to cast his eyes on the Princess."

"Aren't you just imagining that?" he asked.

"There's nothing to imagine," she said, "if I wanted to pass over Valentine's chances I could have Seehase at my feet tomorrow. Naturally I don't even dream of doing such a thing."

"But what about the Princess," the General said, "assuming that things are as you say. If he should propose to her she would have to choose between him and Valentine." The

General spoke loudly in his excitement. "And she'd have to be pretty simple-minded not to . . ."

"Sst!" said his wife. "Simple-minded or not, she's in love with Valentine."

"I can't say that I'm of the opinion that Valentine reciprocates to any overwhelming degree," he said.

"On the contrary," she said, "our son let himself be overwhelmed only a short time ago."

The General listened entranced to the roulades which were really ringing out quite splendidly.

"How do you know that?" he demanded. "When did it happen?"

"We'd all gone out," she said. "It was Sunday a week ago. The Professor was away, too, and the Princess was left all alone. Valentine was supposed to be at the races but he came home early. He denies it, of course, but I have my proofs."

"What proofs, for example?" he asked.

"Women notice a good deal," she answered. "You can take my word for it."

"Then he will have to marry her," the General said simply.

"But you see," his wife went on, "it is President Seehase who will have to provide her with a dowry." The General's wife smiled archly.

"How can that be?" he asked.

"Oh, for ambition's sake," she answered and, as her husband merely shrugged his shoulders, she asked, "or do you know of someone else who is anxious to do it?"

At that moment both their gazes were fixed on the street. They were silent. Then the General said suddenly, "This is not the first time that I've seen that dark blue car around here. It doesn't belong to anyone in the neighborhood either."

"It's been standing there an hour already," his wife said. At that moment the door behind them opened and the Princess said in her monotonous voice, "It's half past seven already. Where is Herr von Lambart?"

She stood waiting for them to answer, leaning slightly forward with her young and flower-like face, framed in ash-blond hair, and gazed innocently at them out of violet blue eyes. Her old lavender dress revealed her immature shoulders and her long, undeveloped, childish bones. A lanky little soul, one

like a hundred others, had come in suddenly and said, "It's half past seven already. Where is Herr von Lambart?" To the ears of the General and his wife it sounded like, "I am the Princess." They greeted her silently.

The Princess went past them, stepping like a dancer to the farthest seat in the room. Then she threw one thin leg over the other and said petulantly, "Of course, I don't have to go to the concert. I can just as well stay right here." But she was merely pathetic.

Her tutor had followed her in and was standing behind her chair saying, "Your Excellency, Herr von Lambart may have met President Seehase who has probably explained to him that concerts have lost their meaning in the present world. Your Excellency should remember, too, that the happiness of the individual, and his rights, have also lost their meaning. We still exist, of course, and we may register our opinions, but things of the mind have not the slightest influence at present. Don't imagine, your Excellency, that there is anyone who really gives them a moment's thought."

"A moment's thought?" the Princess echoed, turning her thoughtless little head in order to

stare into the eyes of the thinker. His eyes seemed watery and visionary to her, watchful like those of a wild animal and as shifty, too. He was short, only his gray head on his broad, but high shoulders reached above the Princess' chair.

"Who told you, my friend," the General asked, "that the President doesn't care for music?"

"He likes to hear me anyway," the Princess said, staring at the General's wife, who was frightened by the penetration so much simplicity could show.

"The President's a kind of thief," she hastened to say, "and whether or not a thief cares for music doesn't . . ."

The Princess merely continued to stare at her out of her violet blue eyes.

"Of course, we don't condemn anyone for his crime," the Professor explained, "so long as it's committed in the world's way. It's all a question of being able to meet the world on its own terms, a benefaction we all strive for in piety of soul."

The General watched him, indulgent because he was his friend.

"My friend," he said, "you are satisfied sim-

ply to understand what you cannot change. Yet all you have to do is to say to any man, 'I know you, sir,' and you catch him squarely under the heart."

"And would you be willing to use what you know about the President against him?" his wife asked, "as a last resort, that is."

"Now I'm afraid I'm going to have to laugh again when I think of it," the General said. "Picture this to yourself, if you can. I had had myself shipped home for a time to work in the interior. A short while previous I'd lost my eye in the trenches, due to some lack of precaution . . ."

"Simply because of the care you took of the soldiers under you, my dear," his wife interrupted.

"Yes, yes," he said, "it's of no importance. As I said, I got work in a military bureau. One day a civilian came in and bid for the right to sell provisions. He didn't look half bad so we told him to take a seat. But while he was talking to us, I recognized him as a common soldier whom I'd run across three days before in the same office. I was going to unmask the fellow when he said, 'The neutral countries pay me what I ask and it's no busi-

ness of mine whether the enemy gets the goods in the end or not.' Whereupon he got the contract. In my amazement I'd let the right moment to act slip by. But what can you do with people of that sort anyway?" The General's shoulders were stooped when he finished his story. He was smiling shyly, his whole round face benevolent.

"You never told me that before," his wife exclaimed. "So that's what he was! So that's what he comes from!"

"He wasn't even a business man," the General added. "I looked him up at the time. He represented nothing and nobody. His whole stock in trade was chance."

"And now the opportunity's slipped by and you didn't wipe him out of existence!" The General's wife wrung her hands.

"Well, if I had, it would have been all over with my secret hold on him. He'd never have blinked his eyes as he does now when I tell him that I know what he is. It's the one consolation I have left," the General said.

"Besides," the Professor added, "nowadays we don't wipe people who have money out of existence. It would be unethical."

"I can't bear it any longer!" said the General's wife. She walked over to the garden door, the Princess following her.

"Will he come soon?" the Princess asked plaintively. "You know I love him so much."

The General's wife muttered, "Then you'd better learn in the first place never to bank on him." She said it, trusting in the poor little thing's simplicity.

"It would be highly unethical," the Professor declared. "Just stop to think what it would lead to if our rich men were not protected against arrest. Of course, a number of errors have crept in recently in this respect since the law insists on mixing in things that have nothing whatsoever to do with it. Ten million marks is about the limit of the law's jurisdiction. That's pretty definite now. It's been sanctified.

"At that figure begins society's right to have itself respected. And no one whose arrest can weaken society can possibly be a scoundrel. I bow my hoary head to it. As far as I'm concerned, President Seehase stands above the law."

"You are a man of order, Professor," said the General, "but what thanks do you get for

it?" He looked at his friend's coat that seemed dusty with age.

The Professor answered serenely and with a tranquillity that was at once deep and untroubled. "Faith is its own reward," he said. "I am a capitalist without money. It's true I have nothing, but in the arduous ways of the spirit, I have won the right to see eye to eye with those who have. And it's a right that I won't easily surrender."

"Is it possible for you to go on thinking and yet never reach the point of lawlessness?" his friend asked.

"I reach God," said the Professor, "and He is at one and the same time the extreme anarchist and the strictest respecter of things as they are." There was power in his words.

"Professor Wunder," said his friend tenderly. He took his arm, and, the taller man bending down to listen to the smaller, they walked slowly through the room.

At the window the Princess was saying, "Do you suppose he'll come down Hardenberg Street? I don't like him to come down March Street, but he usually does nowadays."

She was distracted by some children who,

in the excitement of play, were chasing one another in front of a moving street car. Then she noticed the dark blue automobile. She admired it for some time, full of a half shy desire. Would she and Valentine some day ride together in a splendid car like that? Would her singing ever bring her enough money for that? Or the position Professor Wunder had with the motion picture company?

The General's wife laughed tactfully. The old tutor, who was devoted to the Princess, had taken her over from her ducal father for a fee which just permitted him to subsist. He was a peculiar person, a good deal like her husband in temperament, the General's wife thought. And the two of them had discovered one another. That was how the Princess had come to live with them. . . .

Her teacher had rescued her, for at that time the Duke was all for having her vanish into some church retreat or sanitarium where she might no longer be an obstacle to his high-flown plans for her elder sister.

Professor Wunder had taught the poor innocent child the first words of adult speech she had ever known. She still had lapses, of course, when she spoke like a child. But she

noticed them herself now and when she did she would run and hide. Professor Wunder forbade people to follow her at such times. There was nothing extraordinary about her. She did not know very much. . . . But she loved Valentine . . . and she was a Princess. The General's wife stroked her thin arm comfortingly.

"Some day," she said, "Valentine will earn enough to buy you both a beautiful automobile like that one."

"Will he really?" the poor child asked, "and he will come down Hardenberg Street, won't he?"

The General's wife turned to stare after the two men. General von Lambart and Professor Wunder were walking arm in arm around the big center table. They were not talking now but had both grown silent as friends do.

They had known one another for five years. Of course they had not been together for any great length of time, but it had been a time of trial. Each had watched the other struggle and, in spite of defeat, not lose courage. And they had helped one another with mutual respect and good-will. More than that they could not do.

Wunder had appreciated General Von Lambart's scruples to the full when the General was with Seehase and had felt obliged to leave him. And, without being able to follow it, the General had understood the mental agony of the Professor who was daily compelled to falsify history to meet the requirements of the cinema or a scenario. And he had had plenty of other demeaning jobs before that. He went through it all humbly, however, for the Princess' sake.

The friends understood one another however much they might refrain from confidences. They had met for the first time in a book-store. Both of them had happened to reach for the same volume when each withdrew his hand and politely urged the other to take the book. Neither was any longer used to such courtesy and both were pleasantly surprised. This surprise was the basis of their friendship.

The General's wife turned back to the window. The door of the car was open and a woman had stepped out. It was the same woman she had seen before. And, as before, she crossed the street and walked towards the garden gate, paying no attention to the shov-

ing that passers-by gave her. She turned her eyes away from the window to let them wander over the whole front of the house. They shone strangely large in the whiteness of her face.

Again the General's wife felt how elegantly dressed this woman was, only this time she was not able to tell, in her excitement, from what shops the clothes came.

And excitement had her completely in its power. She felt as if she were being caught up in some decisive plan though she did not know whose. Mortal fear gripped her as to what all this might mean. There were dangers to which Valentine had laid himself open two years before! Were they coming back on him in some dreadful form now? Oh, how could she tell?

Once, in a moment of weakness, Valentine had wept, but she had not been able to make out anything he said because his tears blurred his words so. But someone had been killed, she gathered, one of them, quite a young fellow, scarcely more than a child. . . . The woman who stood outside might be that boy's mother coming to avenge her son.

The General's wife made an effort not to

scream, and, at the same moment she heard someone whimpering. It was the Princess. She had covered her face with her hands through which soft, heart-rending sobs escaped. No doubt this was jealousy. Even the General's wife felt it. All those perilous fears suddenly evaporated as her nature triumphed. She hated that unknown woman on the street.

Attracted by the Princess' sobs, the General and the Professor came back.

"I must find out who she is," the General said.

"Come, your Excellency," said the Professor in alarm.

But the Princess would not go at once. She did not mean to relinquish a moment of her unhappiness. She reached towards the door with the hangings in order to support herself.

Suddenly the woman below could make out faces. She could see them all. This proximity was a little too close for her, too, so she moved back to the edge of the gutter though she continued to stare upwards. Then she turned and crossed the street with that strangely graceful step which the General's wife remembered. She got into the car. The automobile began to move and wheeled to the left into March

Street, in the direction of the Zoölogical Gardens.

But no sooner had the automobile vanished than Valentine appeared. He was standing exactly where the automobile had been waiting for the last hour. He must have been lurking around some corner waiting for it to disappear. And now he was hurrying home with long strides. They heard the front doors opened and he entered the drawing-room.

The Princess flushed to the roots of her bobbed hair. When he had kissed his mother's hand, the Princess saw he was coming next to her. It was impossible not to speak to him, but she pressed one of her white hands over her flushed face, almost covering it. She let him do what he wanted with the other hand. Behind her watched the Professor, his arms outstretched in the attitude of a guardian angel.

The General let his wife do the talking.

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked. "The concert has already started."

"I should have told you," he said politely, "I have tickets for the Scala instead."

As he turned to speak to his mother, the

Princess bolted out of the room. She was through the glass connecting door before he realized what had happened.

"It's for a couple of Argentine dancers," he called after her and wanted to follow her but the Professor blocked the way. With a gesture that seemed to urge discretion, the old man closed the glass door after him. Through it they could see him sit down at the piano again. It was only after a good deal of hesitation that he followed the Princess towards their respective rooms. They knew that at times like this he did not go in to her, but would merely pace up and down the corridor with his hands behind his back until she had had time to compose herself again.

"Well," said the General's wife in the drawing-room, "who was it?"

Valentine tried to put on a surprised look. "Whom do you mean?" he asked. But one glance at the General's sceptical smile told him that it was no use.

"The Baroness Hartmann," he said resignedly.

"The real thing?" they asked him.

"Well, autos, pearls, and a villa near the

Zoölogical Gardens are real things," he said, "so I daresay her title is real, too."

The sparkling eyes of the General's wife leaped from Valentine to her husband. "Hartmann?" she said. The General shrugged his shoulders so that they seemed higher than ever.

"I knew him," he said. "He came from Hamburg. Piet and Hartmann. One of the sons left the firm and travelled. He got his title from Vienna or the Pope. But he's been dead for years now. What I didn't know is that he was ever married."

"They were only married a short while."

"I'll ask about him," he said. "Tell me how you came to know her."

Valentine's eyes rested questioningly on his father. He was embarrassed and wanted to gain time.

"It's nothing really serious, is it?" the General asked in an undertone.

"No," Valentine declared.

"Tell us where you met her then," his mother demanded.

Valentine decided to laugh. "At the casino," he said with creditable ease. The General

whistled through his teeth while his wife let her hands drop to her sides.

"This is all that was lacking," she said faintly.

"No, no, I assure you," Valentine's voice grew still more polite. He was pale. "Your suspicions are all wrong," he said. "Baroness Hartmann is a lady. I beg you not to have any false suspicions. Our relations are of a strictly business nature. I could introduce her to you at any time." He went on still more tractably for he was a little shocked himself at what he had just said.

"He's losing the little backbone he had left," thought the General, himself a little shocked whenever Valentine tried to placate them with those rather servile gestures that made his body almost too graceful. Without understanding why exactly, the General felt that something was wrong.

"He's been a professional dancer, too, among other things," he could not help thinking. "An officer, a clerk, a small-scale plunger and, on top of that, a professional dancer." He stepped forward and sat down beside the reading lamp which he turned on.

"Won't you tell me about it?" his mother asked confidentially.

Valentine was still considering what he should tell them; his body felt weak yet. It was a strange experience for the General's wife. Once she had reproached herself because he seemed like the General in his weakness and inability to succeed. Later she had not been able to gauge his case. He had distinguished himself in the War and yet the proud young lieutenant had now become something far worse than his father, something cringing towards the world in which it lived. Formerly when the same world was seeking to kill him he had confronted it with far more courage.

"Very well, Mother," he said, "there isn't much to tell really. But just as you like. You know that when you gamble you don't always win. Well, on one such occasion, Baroness Hartmann was sitting next me . . ."

"Was that an accident?" she asked.

He hesitated for a moment. "Yes, Mother," he said, but corrected himself smiling, "on my part, that is. I didn't know her then but she helped me out. It happened as such things do. Soon it was impossible to refuse without

seeming rude. You can hardly imagine how much cleverness and tact she used."

"Did she want interest?" the General asked from behind his newspaper. And then, as Valentine kept a polite silence, "Have you paid her back yet?"

"I tried to," he said, "in fact I kept away from the club until I could pay her something. But somehow it happened, I don't exactly know how myself, but I was in debt to her again."

"A money relationship, and you don't call that serious," the General turned away, moving his chair with him. He did it chiefly so that they should not see him color. He was beginning to feel his gall stones more and more keenly of late.

The General's wife asked frankly, "Is it passion?"

"Certainly not on my part, Mother," he said.

"But on her part?" she asked.

"Apparently not in the way you mean, Mother," he said.

"Then I don't understand you," she said.

"It's hard to explain."

"Her automobile stands over there day after

day," she said, "and I've seen her here twice myself, which doesn't mean that she hasn't been here oftener."

"I believe, Mother, that she's been coming here practically all winter," he said, "at least ever since I had to give her my name and address as security for her loan. She probably had them both already, though. She wanted to know a great deal about me, from way back in my childhood until now. I had the feeling that that was why she pressed the money on me."

"What good can your childhood do her?"

"She's interested in it in general," he said, "but particularly in our house."

"Our house?" she asked.

"It seems that our house was standing here twenty-five years ago when she lived right across the way. Of course, she doesn't say it was she, but a friend of hers. Do you understand?"

"Not a word," she said, "what does it all mean?"

"One night in winter she saw her friend's servant girl leave the house and take a newborn baby to the fountain. Apparently there was a fountain in front of our house then."

"The first true word you've said," came the General's voice.

The General's wife lost patience completely. "Well," she said, "so a servant girl drowned a baby twenty-five years ago."

"No, not drowned," Valentine said. He seemed embarrassed and laughed constrainedly. "The child was laid at the rim of the fountain. When the servant looked back the baby had already been taken away. Someone from our house must have taken it."

"Better and better," the General said jokingly, "and have we still got it?" he asked.

The General's wife couldn't make head or tail of it.

"And so Baroness Hartmann is still worrying about the servant girl's baby?" she asked.

"She claims she has recognized it recently," Valentine declared. At this there was a flash of fire in the eyes of the General's wife. She started to speak but kept silent. Her next thought was, "And I thought she was no more than thirty-five at most." . . . Valentine, too, grew silent.

The General gave his opinion. "I don't want to take the words out of your mouth, Ina," he said, "but of course the baby was the

Baroness Hartmann's. All the rest is folderol. The Baroness simply had a child out of wedlock."

No one answered. There was another pause. Finally even the General began to catch his breath. His wife bent forward towards Valentine. There was distraction in the look that peered into his eyes.

"In whom has she recognized the child?" she asked.

"You have guessed right, Mother," he answered with some hesitation.

The General had turned completely around again. He was staring at both of them. Suddenly he arose. His head bent on one side, he walked across the wide floor towards them, with slow, dragging steps, steps as slow as if he expected that there must be still another twist to this affair and was hesitating to meet it. Finally he came up to them. The General's wife looked from one to the other.

"It begins like a fairy tale," she said

Chapter Two

VALENTINE had been visiting at the house near the Zoölogical Gardens for several weeks past. Whenever he opened the entrance gate he saw someone at the window waiting for him. As he went up the sanded garden path and passed the formal flower beds and the balustrade that invited him so majestically, he saw that the house was already astir. The low villa with its wide windows would let in all the sun it could get now. Its curtains had been drawn back and the shadows fled. He approached to find the door being held open by a servant with an expectant smile.

There were two servants, Franz and old Tietge. They seemed to have known him a long while and were so studiously kind that his easy nature yielded simply to the charm of staying there and never encountering a worried face. It reminded him of the lost security of his life and its forgotten safe-guards.

On the thick carpet in the vestibule, Clara,

the maid, was standing, turning her cheek up merrily for him to stroke with his finger. Then she would take him in to Frau von Hartmann, who looked as happy as her servants, seeming to enjoy everything and to take all things as a matter of course.

She put him in a seat by the open window and gave him his book and his cigarettes. Then she slipped quietly out of the room. She no longer excused herself when she left him alone for a while before dinner.

Behind him, in the window, he saw the softly whispering treetops reflected, the interior of the plain bright sitting-room joined by a wide passage to the white dining-room walls, and then green again at the window on the terrace. No tall furniture interfered with the sweep of the eye. Level, with proportion and sensitiveness in their arrangement, the groups of furniture withdrew before the gaze like a corps that comes together and divides again.

Only the flowers reached above them, yellow and red. And there were not many flowers. The single bright splash of color in the room was the portrait of the hostess on the wall, done by Renoir.

It flowered in yellows and reds, the shawl was yellow, the hair red. Yellow and red glowed in the gold carpet and the ruby she wore. The light was yellow and red and the lustre about the person there represented, was yellow and red, too. But lustre and light shone transparent upon that perfectly white face and the profound darkness of the quiet and purposeful eyes.

It was this woman's youth that the artist had caught and had depicted flashing with the rawest colors of life for all who should come after. It was her youth. What remained, as Valentine knew, was an aftermath, an afterglow of sunset, life returning on itself, a vestige.

He thanked his stars that chance had not brought him to her earlier. The Baroness Hartmann in the full splendor of her youth! Valentine knew that he could not have resisted her. Valentine von Lambart was not humble, but one must be sure where one is master. Those women and girls who, a few years ago, had shot glances that were a radiant feast in themselves, at the young officer, were cast into the shade beside this woman. They had been rich, too, perhaps, and had

borne noble names, but their power was as nothing compared with that of this woman in red and gold. For the artist had made her triumphant in a world of victors. An imperishable image, she held her place among the conquerors of life with whom Valentine von Lambart had enjoyed only a brief visit.

The longer he looked at the portrait the more he felt himself treading on forbidden ground, even now when he had known this woman for months and this portrait of her for weeks.

At first he had said nothing to the Baroness Hartmann about Princess Adele and he had kept all knowledge of the lovely woman from the Princess. The Princess would have been hurt in any case. And he would have been ashamed to tell her how even he, solicitous as he was wherever the gentle Adele was concerned, let himself be pampered here. To the Princess it was he who was generous, but here the favors were all conferred on him. With Adele, with his Princess who was still as playful as a child, he led a kind of double life, a dream-life beyond the disagreeable concerns of life itself.

Here, on the other hand, it was someone else who spun her illusions around him. And what illusions they were, too! For he was enjoying the fruits of an aberration. It was unheard of, it might even be dangerous, but he was turning it to his own account. This house was a fiery pit!

The mistress of the house should not have left him alone so long. Thoughts like these always came to him when she was away. But now she had come back again and had drawn near with her faultless step. She let him lead her in to dinner so quietly, so much as a matter of course, that it left no possible doubt in his mind as to the fitness of his being there. While old Tietge moved up the white easy-chair with its red cushions for Baroness Hartmann, Franz did the same for Valentine.

When the servants had finished serving they vanished into the background through a white door. She never failed to bring back their talk of incidental things to the one important topic, himself. He used to dread those moments of self-disclosure until they had arrived. Then they always turned out easy beyond expectation for as long as he wanted to talk. She was far too experienced to demand confidences be-

yond the point which their intimacy had reached. She would not have permitted them to go farther.

Sometimes her classic poise would sway him so completely that he forgot what was in her mind, ineradicable, as he was sure to see again in a moment.

It was pleasant to sit talking opposite her, with her broad smooth forehead across the table from him when the meal was over. She sat propped up, her tapering arched fingers, on which jewels glowed, dangling from the fair hand beneath her chin. She had a perfectly straight nose with wide nostrils, the only nose, he thought, which did not have power to frighten him in a situation like the present. Face to face with the pale hooked nose of the General's wife, he would not have managed to get out a word.

The quiet penetrating eyes of the Baroness Hartmann were set well apart. Her glance had space to rove between them. He sensed her beautiful dark arch of eyebrows attending to what he was saying. A nerve in her ear twitched visibly because it had caught an interesting word. Her lips were completely relaxed, moist and unconscious.

For the first few times their conversation had been only about the casino where they had first met one another. It was neutral ground, since they must not talk about themselves as yet. Of course they both played for the game's sake. They were both contemptuous of those pranked-out beauties with horn-rimmed spectacles, who squandered their companions' money, and distrustful of the deep-voiced Russian émigrés each of whom, in turn, was banker. The nice little fiddler who earned some kind of a living there aroused the same pity in each of them.

And had Valentine won anything lately? she asked. Had he been lucky with the money she lent him?

It didn't do much good, he told her, because he was always having to take his winnings to some other club where he owed the croupier money. He said the croupier so that she would not suspect him of having other women. Then she asked him about women.

It was at this point that he one day begged his benefactress once and for all not to believe that he was in the habit of accepting favors from women. Only the most extraordinary circumstances could ever have made such

a thing seem pardonable to him, even in this one particular case.

After they had been silent a while, he began to feel at ease again and laughed. At home he passed for a Don Juan. He told her it gayly as though to imply that this time there was no question of women's money involved, simply luck with them.

He told her the particular incident that had made his family think so. One day two men, with duel written large on their faces, had asked for him at the Berliner Street gate. The General's wife had denied that he lived there. He had gone abroad, she said, and had never been heard of again. He was dead. And he really did drop out of sight for some time. This had all been years ago, but the General's wife was still afraid that the two seconds might come back. Of course, she had never said that she thought they were seconds or that he was a Don Juan. In the Berliner Street house one seldom said what one was thinking about anybody else.

Certain other people had afterwards had business with him which was far from an affair of honor. But his family still had the duel idea in their heads. In spite of his laugh he

sounded serious, for his heart was pounding. He had begun in jest but he was on the verge of taking advantage of this self-made opportunity to confess at last the heaviest care he had. For two long years he had borne his trouble single-handed. He had never even dreamed of telling it at home. But here? Yes, here, perhaps, he might be able to tell it. He peered into her eyes.

Then she herself anticipated him by asking if he did not trust his parents enough to confide in them. Were they really in the truest sense his parents? Had they really made him happy? Had he ever had a feeling that he was not where he belonged in life? Had he ever felt that way?

Her one recurrent idea! He was not the son of his parents! That was all she had heard in what he had told her of himself and his troubles. All the time she was really only thinking of her own. He gave up; even she could not help him to bear his heaviest burden.

He said considerately, as if he had not understood her implication, that the present age had been for him as for all the rest, a disillusionment and waste of time. As a clerk in an office he obviously could not do the things he

was born to do. She interrupted him to find out what he was born to do. He hesitated but she insisted on an answer. He really didn't know. "How should I know?" he asked bitterly and then, after a pause, which she left undisturbed, "We aren't born for war, I suppose, and yet it was precisely during the War that I felt the greatest confidence in myself. I was a filth-covered, hunted wild beast, never sure of my life from one moment to the next, and yet I had self-confidence then. Not that I put in the whole war in the trenches, that was only at first. I was behind the lines, too, and, among other things, once had to ransack a town from top to bottom for some choice cognac for my commander. I finally found some in a brothel. Now that wasn't exactly inspiring but, in spite of such things, I still believed in my mission here below. Under President Seehase I no longer believe in it, though that's not altogether his fault.

"I believe that every society either gives courage to the novices who have to grow up in it," he went on, "or it discourages them. Present day society can do nothing but discourage them. It doesn't know how to do anything else so what is there to say about it?"

A pause ensued because he reddened and had to drink a whole glass of wine to regain his composure.

"No one ever stopped me from committing any folly under the sun," he said, "for who could foresee what might later be called criminal or what might be called power and success? Could Seehase have foretold his good fortune? Everyone backs his own cards and we're all in the game, but so far I've failed to take any of the tricks. . . . When papa was general manager we had plenty of money, but it was the worst possible time to have it since you were just that much more certain to get into some wildcat scheme or other. What could I do? I opposed my own class. I developed a social conscience. I first felt it in the true sense of the word when the republic, through its representative, Seehase, let my father make all that money.

"At that time any backwardness on my part would have been interpreted as treason so I did what my comrades wanted. I simply did as they did. But they got me into their own hands in this way and unfortunately they're the people to take advantage of it, as I've had occasion to find out."

He felt that he had said a good deal. He breathed quietly and waited to see if she would ask him anything. But she kept silent and he went on.

"Then papa lost his position and we were poorer than we'd ever been in our lives, which, however, did not prevent my comrades from demanding more money from me. They knew too much so I paid. I got the money by gambling. Oh, yes, we play for the game's sake. Yes, and because we've got into hot water. Besides, I couldn't stay a dancing partner forever."

He clapped his hands to his mouth.

"Pardon," he said, "I should never have told you that. Is it worth knowing even for the sake of knowing it? Still I'm not the first who has turned a careful upbringing to account by zealously piloting the ladies in the big hotels. And the ladies paid, all right. Once I was in their good graces they paid more than the casino or Seehase himself. That's where I got my dexterity, the art of bowing even to the husbands of the women who paid me."

For the first time he encountered hardened eyes and compressed lips.

"It was wealthy middle class society," he went on. "Every society knows what it can exact from the beings it has trodden down and in what ways they can still be useful to it. I danced with this society and was well paid for it. I asked for nothing more. All I have to say is that it's a discovery of wealthy middle class society that paid professionals can be made to dance with its wives and daughters. The nobility used to misuse its dependents too, but not to that extent."

His features had lost their sharpness again. The smile with which he bowed was polite and deprecating. He drank to the woman sitting opposite. Ah, it was a menial weakness! The non-resistant spirit of the hireling showed through.

Both recognized it and the longest pause so far ensued.

"And I've just turned my twenty-fifth year," he muttered, "I've left plenty of corpses behind me already."

Suddenly he was conscious of the word he had used. "Not real ones," he exclaimed, "I didn't mean that. Those are the least part of it. But to make a lounge lizard out of the lieutenant who owned the world, and a petty

clerk out of a hero, that's what took the heart out of life. Sometimes I feel as if I weren't a definite living entity at all, but merely a conduit for coincidences. And yet the world keeps crying out for will! My one and only feeling, though, is that I know death and that this civilization is afraid of it. As for me, I can no longer be surprised, not even if I were to find myself attacking our age with hand grenades."

He had drunk a good deal and was beginning to regret it. In front of him a woman was sitting, this woman of all others. And he was carrying on this irresponsible prattle. He made an effort to check himself but his ear could hear nothing but that word, corpses!

Suddenly a picture took form in his mind. It was not a war picture, it had come after that. He saw a wood, a wood of two years ago. Three of them were talking there, the smallest in the middle. They were all singing since the birds were singing, too. Every bush was in flower and a blue sky shone through the newly fledged trees.

When they reached the narrowest part of the path between the beeches, the third comrade nodded to Valentine to go on with the

short fellow. Valentine obeyed. He put his arm around the short youth and bent over him, shielding him and, at the same time, preventing him from looking around. If only he had stopped short at that moment! If only he had dared to! Then things would not be as they were now.

Valentine had not dared to rebel. He had only had time to whisper a warning into the victim's ear when the shot rang out. The taller man had shot the smaller from behind. The child lay there, for he was still a child, twitching so gently that the dead leaves in which he had fallen hardly rustled.

The boy had been a traitor, though probably only a childish one. At the same time this one little corpse had seemed more unbearable than all the horrible, immeasurable harvest of the War. Valentine fled from it, a few steps only and then dropped down behind a beech. The third comrade drew near and saw the state he was in. He looked at his face and reached for his revolver again.

Then Valentine had leaped up and at him. The revolver had flown into the bushes and the man fled with a heavy gait. Valentine had

not seen him since. But after that they had kept after him.

They did not believe that he would keep silent forever, but as long as he gave them money, they felt surer of their hold on him and more certain that he was harmless. Whenever he stopped paying they threatened him. They were not simply scoundrels. Didn't they at bottom really have a right to despise him? But that little corpse divided him from them, as well as the fact that however transitory the present and present-day society might be, though it was but an interlude, he had compromised with it eternally, if only as a lounge lizard.

So he returned to the hotel corridors and made his bows again. His mind hovered between corpses and bows.

The woman opposite him could think of nothing but, "Poor boy!" "Poor boy," she thought, "so this is what his youth has been. I should have been there. I would have understood him better . . ." Still she knew she could not be sure even of that. Who really understands another's youth? . . . Even though it might be not unlike one's own.

Baroness Hartmann thought of herself in the drawing-room at the embassy among the cultured people she had known there for years. A gentleman respectfully surrendered to her the seat next the ambassador's wife. From then back to the old times was a long and painful road. She had avoided it and had as good as forgotten it. At present she recalled from her past nothing more than occasional and accidentally heightened pictures which some wisdom of her soul instantly obliterated again.

Then she saw herself in an office as vividly as though it were yesterday. She was surrounded by faces which she strove to rival in commercial coldness. Then the office of yesterday changed into a death chamber of long ago. Someone was dying there. Her husband was dearer to her now that he was going from her and yet he had never known her in spite of their marriage.

Why had that been, the thought came to her? Had life demanded too much of love? On the contrary, but she recalled that life had felt the need to shield itself against every feeling in order to come relentlessly through. Hartmann, at least, had loved her, even

though he had sold her his name for money's sake. But love had stopped at that time and she did not want to know anything of it. And as a result, she was sitting there now, powerless to help her own child, who did not even know his own mother. She had money now, of course, the goal of all her struggles. She could give him money now, too, though it was precisely because of this that he did not recognize her as his mother. So everything found a kind of compensation. Against her will a word was taking form in her mind, "I'm guilty. I'm expiating my own guilt. It is I who am the guilty one."

Her pride said no and wanted to leave the question abruptly and hear no more about it. Life was hard for everyone, even for those who had the good fortune to grow up in the household of General von Lambart. And the response came immediately, "I can't help it now. I handed him over to chance. I'm not punished enough since he's still alive. My real punishment lies in not being able to undo what's already happened. For he's already disillusioned. He's already learned to hate. . . . But is it too late yet? Am I really too late to save him? I, who cold-bloodedly took my seat

beside the ambassador's wife while my child was in danger. I, to whom all dangers are so well known from my own experience."

Now scenes from her life began to throng back on her out of the depths where they ought to have remained hidden. Things which no longer gave a sign of life were still alive there. Deep under her social life, her marriage, her lucky inheritance, a totally different life nodded to her from the past. You were part of that once, too, she thought. And there was neither rank nor privilege in that life. There was no cool clarity in it either. It had been head over heels, it seemed to her. She no longer understood that figure which was beating about there, nor the fate which was savagely raging over the figure. To her own conscious life she had tamed her destiny.

The figure passed through a forgotten torture chamber, through a hall of justice. There she could see the only man she had loved, and whom she was now having tried. Even his accomplice, who had betrayed him to her, took some sort of form after an endlesss time. . . . Gambling halls, the blue sea, the whole naked state of her former struggle for existence had to be disturbed again for the sim-

ple reason that that forgotten figure was moving through it.

Its gestures grew ever more frenzied, vaguer in their shadows, the remoter they became. And then they vanished, were no more! We do not wish to remember that strange figure; our course is chosen.

But the strange apparition made one more attempt and was not to be denied. It laid a baby on the rim of a fountain.

Baroness Hartmann suddenly stretched out her hand . . . to take back the child, to get it back again. A glass was overturned and the young man in front of her covered up the wine spot on the table cloth with a napkin. The motion recalled him from his thoughts. Baroness Hartmann, too, was startled out of hers. She mastered the situation, however, rising from the table with a hostess' agreeable smile.

"I'm very much afraid of flattering you," Valentine said, "though I'm often faced to, but do you know, Felicie, the rings on your hands . . . I don't know anything that's better looking."

"O, thanks," she said, "though you're mistaken about why I wear them. I don't love my

rings simply for the emphasis they give my hands. They are a passion with me."

They came to a low table. It was a little crystal cabinet, with rosewood feet, very delicately carved. Two or three little objects under glass invited the glance of whoever sat down in front of them. The little table stood among other furnishings next the wall, and under the portrait of the hostess.

They sat down together. The little crystal cabinet and the objects in it tinkled softly. Then a new sight suddenly appeared in front of them. It was a little dull metal casket that slid out of a groove in the wall and into the crystal cabinet. There it rested as though expectant.

Valentine stared at his hostess, but she simply sat there, her fixed expressionless eyes never stirring from the little casket. She touched one leg of the cabinet and the casket sprang open with an audible snap while a red glow flashed from it.

The fire within the jewel thus suddenly exposed streamed forth as though from the depths of a mine, refracting in the cabinet's crystal walls. It cast a visible tinge over their faces as they peered closer at it. And as they

glanced about them, the whole room seemed filled with the wonder of inaccessible lands. Valentine recalled those Arab travellers who stared down from the top of some abrupt and sheer-smooth precipice, below which miraculous jewels lay strewn as thick as gravel.

"It's the biggest ruby I've ever seen," Baroness Hartmann said and, as though she were looking at it for the first time, she kept her big, quiet, fawnlike eyes fixed on it.

"I saw it for the first time at the Duchess von Leutenberg's," she said, "and it was settled then and there that I would have to have it. That was in Nice. Later they were half ruined and I bought their villa and all its appointments from them. This drawing-room furniture came from there. But I promised to give it all back to them if only they would sell me this jewel."

"And they took you at your word," he said.

"That was all long ago," she went on. "The Duchess prized the ruby as a talisman. After she died, my old business adviser kept track of the young duke until he saw his chance. And then I got the jewel at last! How fortunate that I'm a Catholic. That jewel can only be in Catholic hands!"

Could he believe his ears? Catholic hands, what did she mean? Valentine looked at her with some surprise. (If anything, she seemed to feel all things as emotion. Whether it was Catholic or profane had not appeared to make much difference.) She struck one as perfect precisely because she seemed to express a being so conscious, cool and deliberate in business matters. But had he been mistaken about her after all?

"Since then the Duke has done everything to get back his talisman," she said. "He's not at all averse to stealing it back so I have to hide it carefully." She looked up smiling. "But he won't get it back," she went on. "Whoever gets it from me now will have to have me completely in his power." Her slow glance met his eyes and did not stray from them again.

It confused him and he had to make an effort in order to keep his poise. Could it be passion that was betraying her in this way again? No, her distraction was of a more unusual and more painful sort. She was a woman who, to put it mildly, knew the world. And yet her sound reason had got tangled up with some kink in her brain and nobody could straighten it out again.

She rose to call for tea. In passing him she ran her fingers through his hair, combing it back with them and feeling the skin on his scalp through his heavy hair. He sat perfectly still. He knew what she was after, an occasion. The very movement of her fingers revealed to him the form it would take. She said nothing to him, she never said anything to him. He would have to find out for himself. He himself would have to find out her meaning. And in spite of the uncontrollable shame he felt, he had to sit there as though he suspected nothing. He sat still feeling nothing but the falseness of his position.

Old Tietge set the tea on the crystal table top from which the ruby and its casket had both vanished. She sipped her tea in silence. Then Valentine left. He was still quivering from the pain his embarrassment had caused him.

He wanted to rush down the stairs without stopping, but at that moment, the maid, Clara, came from the opposite side of the vestibule. She was holding out a rather surprising gray top hat which she was brushing. This made Valentine take notice of an older man who was waiting in front of the mirror. He turned

a tousled head towards Valentine. His movements were those of an elderly man, but his wig was black. The twisted points of his moustache stood out stiffly from his sunken cheeks. Valentine recognized this dumpy figure which suddenly disappeared. Baroness Hartmann had a remarkable business adviser.

Kappus, the banker, had loaned money for years on the pension of General Vogel von Lambart. He had retained a number of such clients from his earlier business ventures.

"We must not be too proud," he once said, speaking in this connection to Valentine, who was acting as intermediary for his father. "Of course, I'm fussy too, like the Deutsche Bank, for I've become a real banking institution by now. But when a ranking general comes to me and, moreover, when he's been coming to me ever since he was a lieutenant, should I be the one to turn down the deal? Of course, they say that he didn't used to call me such flattering names. But haven't I been more than compensated? I used to get twenty per cent, though nowadays they all get one hundred."

It was this man who had procured the ruby for her. Valentine saw him in his mind's eye.

He walked along Berliner Street with the image of Kappus in his mind as the banker must have looked in hotels and gambling halls and even aboard trans-Atlantic liners in his hunt for the Duke von Leutenberg. He had begrudged no time lost. How devoted to Baroness Hartmann he was! Probably he felt at one with her in their passion for precious stones. A ruby was no family heirloom to people of their sort, and yet, for that very reason, perhaps, they approached the stone more nearly in hardness, in tenacity and the fire of life.

He made an effort to rid himself of the image of Kappus and to detach him from Felicie. But she insisted on remaining a strange adventurous apparition, constantly striving upwards from circumstances that were far from auspicious and through scenes that had a way of shifting suddenly.

Who was she really? Did the diplomatic circles in which she was reported to move really know her? There was no other way of getting information about her, least of all from herself, since she never talked. He gave all his thought to it. It seemed to him almost as though she were a mute. He could not under-

stand how she ever got him to talk since she herself spoke so little.

Then he remembered how glad he was to talk to her, how glad he was to unburden himself, sitting across from her smooth broad forehead and big quiet eyes, while she sat propped up, her hands with their rings drooping under her chin. Those hands had beaten their way up and through, out of God knows what. This woman was strong and she was teaching him self-confidence again, him to whom his little Princess had only sympathy to give. Thanks to the world, he was filled with fear and despondency at twenty-five. Previously he had been satisfied merely to be good in peace. Then her stronger nature had arrived on the scene and had taken him under her wing as though it were nothing. And now she was demanding, silently and emphatically demanding, that he resume his courage and simply believe in all things again, but above all in her.

What ought he to think of her. . . ?

He went along breathing in deeply the evening scent of the gardens. The powers of resistance within him felt a need to relax. He took deep breaths. Was what he thought about

her really true in the last analysis? And if not, where did the truth lie then? In Berliner Street where no one ever confessed the real state of his affairs to anyone else? Extreme good breeding accepted everything as certitude there.

That night Valentine von Lambart asked himself, "If my parents really weren't my parents, could they be any different than they have been? Any more correct or useless? And would they ever tell me the truth to my face? They'd be far too tactful," he decided. "They'd rather let me guess at it by degrees. Well, maybe I'm on the way to guess it now."

Baroness Hartmann was a woman of little breeding. Hers had been a truly savage story, thinly veiled and easily told. She took her lost son unquestioningly to her bosom and petted and loved him. But most astonishing of all he, too, felt a certain sympathy for her, a sense of confidence untroubled by any strangeness. How was it possible that he, the son of a Prussian general, should feel himself akin to an adventuress?

As a matter of fact, he had made her his lover in the finest sense. And yet Valentine

had never felt towards this lovely woman, who had just turned the point of maturity, as a man does towards a woman. What had been his feeling towards her then? At that point he let himself drop down on one of the park benches.

He sat there for a long time, head in hand, as though lost in thought. At times he felt that it was impossible for him ever to return to Berliner Street. Suppose he simply went back to his true mother!

Of course he had hardly arrived at the General's before the very house itself assured him, even before the inmates had a chance to, that adventure is not the whole of life. Adventure always remains a little incredible, even granting that the life of any family ten years ago was not exactly as middle class stories are wont to depict it. The General's wife appeared and he saw that beside her, Felicie von Hartmann represented simon-pure romanticism.

For several days he did not go near her again while his doubts continued to arise. He recalled that his arrival in this world had at one time secured an inheritance for the Gen-

eral's wife. She seemed surprised when he questioned her about it.

"Certainly it's true," she said, "but of course all that money depreciated with the rest."

Her answer was like a blow to him. It seemed as if she meant to imply that he was sneaking off and finding a soft berth where money had not depreciated.

Get free of it all, thought young Valentine. No more pros and cons. Only let things be the way they ought. Was he to go on playing on the strange kink in that poor woman's brain? On that of all things! Never. And it really was at that moment that it first occurred to him that he had been living on her for months. All that time it had never once occurred to him and now all of a sudden he was overwhelmed with the thought. What had happened to him? Was she after all so much closer to him than he had realized?"

He put aside every temptation and avoided the Zoölogical Gardens. He had made up his mind to pay back everything he owed her. It already amounted to so much that it would take him the rest of his life to clear off his debt

as things now stood. But that only served to stiffen his spine.

She knew that he had purposely stopped coming. She tried writing to him but got no replies. She hunted him up but he knew ways of eluding her. Through Kappus, she had just done the most important stroke of business in her whole career. And in this affair with Valentine, too, she at last made up her mind to go to the banker.

His banking house created confidence with its polished wainscoting, its heavy carpets and the quietness with which business was transacted even at the height of the recent crisis. He managed never to give the impression that business was slack.

Kappus no longer had a certain celebrated writer for his private secretary, times had changed again. But he had another with an even more imposing name.

He had removed the framed assignat from the walls of his office with its pictures by the old French masters. The bank note was no longer a suitable allusion.

"Well, Kappus," she said as she came in, "you still manage to grow younger instead of older every day."

"It's because I keep in step with time, Baroness," he said. "Time and I are in harmony." He laid a finger on the top of his wig. Formerly he had been almost gray. He had been beardless then, too, and it pleased him to give an impression so much the opposite of his calling. He liked to look like a priest. Now he permitted more of his own nature to appear. He showed her a picture of his father.

"What do you say," he asked, "haven't I the same hair? The same twirled moustache? The old man used to walk around Vienna like that in the good old liberal days. You and I, Baroness, are both of the old school," he said.

"Kappus," she said, "how does one go about redeeming gambling debts?" She said it only as an opening, only as an excuse for mentioning the name she carried so anxiously in her heart. There were no longer any gambling debts and, besides, she was not thinking of gambling debts at all. Moreover Kappus knew that she never gambled or lent money to gamblers. He hesitated but found a way out of his perplexity in an old and long-cherished memory.

Once upon a time, he said, he had given

money to gamble with to a bad client whom he had had to hound all the way to Monte Carlo. And yet for the only time in his whole life he had not demanded repayment. His only condition was that he be introduced to a certain lady. As he spoke, he looked at her out of his moist, faithful eyes.

"Strange that you should visit me on this of all days," he said, for he had his secret anniversaries.

He remembered how he had been introduced to her at that time. With his shyness and a dubious kind of boldness, he thought he had made the worst possible impression on her. He was sure that he would never see her again. He really believed that this meeting was to be the one bit of poetry he would be permitted on earth. He had gone home to his wife and children. Not for anything would he have told her who he was.

Shortly afterwards, however, she walked into his Berlin office. She knew who he was and yet she did not despise him. Of course, here in his own office, he felt his work to be far less contemptible than it had appeared in her gorgeous villa at Nice.

He had done what she wanted without

question and had procured for her the Duke von Leutenberg's ruby. And he had remained her devoted adviser. She had only to nod for him to act. His payment was that for once the features of a human face had possessed him body and soul.

Now his old friend was sitting before him again, though at first he could not understand the nature of her errand. She was asking with perfect composure, "Do you know a General von Lambart, Veit Vogel von Lambart?"

"How could I help it?" Kappus declared, "I mortgaged his pension for him, if he's the man you mean." He said it quickly, glancing from under his bushy eyebrows.

"Yes," she said, while he let the story of the General's son pass untold. Instead he went into a detailed account of how it is possible to force people to pay even gambling debts.

"You simply bide your time," he said, "until the embarrassed family sells something, a piece of jewelry for example. Then you buy it for genuine even though it's obviously nothing but an imitation." Kappus knew only too well the success of this trick.

"They accept the money," he went on. "Today, my dear friend, poverty is so widespread

that a General's wife will sell paste jewels for real ones. It's a shocking business." Yes, even Kappus groaned in disgust. "Afterwards, of course, you have them where you want them," he concluded.

She had hardly heard what he said. "How can you justify such a thing, Kappus?" she suddenly asked.

He gazed at her speechless for a long time. "What do you mean by justify?" he asked. "We all know what people are. We are merely carrying on affairs as others carried them on long before we were ever heard of. Let others justify them. I can't change things."

Now she had risen. He felt a growing uneasiness that they were becoming less and less at one. He wanted to justify himself.

"You can't complain about me, Baroness," he said. "Your account never varied from one end of the inflation to another. I've let the accounts of old men, the earnings of their whole industrious lives, depreciate without a qualm. Am I their fairy godmother? But yours has stayed at par through thick and thin. . . . But I know that you're a hard headed business woman," he said at parting

as a sort of reassurance to both of them.

Alone again, he passed over his old friend's idiosyncrasy as a whim of affection. "In money affairs, if you have a dashing young man on one hand," thought Kappus, "and, on the other, a woman who has reached a certain age, well . . ."

She was glad to think that she could have kept Valentine's name from Kappus, feeling as dreadfully alone as she did. She stood in front of the bank, no longer certain where she wanted to go in the bustle of the Gendarme Market. Should she go home? She doubted whether she wanted to go home, as Valentine had doubted whether or not to do so that night in the Zoölogical Gardens.

And when she did get home he was sitting there.

He had put aside the temptation as long as he was alone with his thought of her. Up to the time of his conversation with his parents everything had remained unsettled. To question the rightness of his whole previous position in life really sounded too fantastic, even though one looked at one's self in the mirror in search of resemblances. Certainly he didn't have the General's wife's nose, its

bridge showed a certain weakness, an abandon, lacking in his own. His wide lips were almost a proof. He questioned his eyes. Deep gray under fair hair, they were striking, but then they were anything but large and quiet. So the Baroness Hartmann was to remain a stranger to him after all. That gnawing curiosity with which she had filled him began to die down. She herself tended to fade away.

Then his parents had set out to have that talk with him about her one night. Her auto had stood too long in front of the house. She had even let herself be seen again. He had never expected any such session, so many things were always tactfully evaded there. Had he been sufficiently discreet and deprecating during the scene? He believed, so he told them, that neither he nor she had been too intimate. He had taken good care of that.

And he was immediately aware that quite the contrary, she was extremely close to him, that she was still real and close to him. It had been enough simply to talk about her, to hear his voice and others' pronounce her name. He was conscious now that reason no longer mattered and that he would go there again. He

would go to her and find out what she wanted of him.

She looked at him. She was startled. She closed the door. The dining-room door, too, she swung completely to. He let her do it by herself. He felt embarrassed. He simply took two steps towards her, bending over her hand with a sudden sort of collapse that meant repentance. She kept quiet so long that he hesitated whether or not to show some further sign of devotion.

Then she said, "I couldn't go look for you in the casinos this time."

He was startled. Wasn't this confessing that she was the pursuer? With a sort of grand simplicity she was confessing that it was not chance that had led her to him. She had thought long hours about him. Even when he was unknown to her, her thoughts had been hovering about him. For a single moment he saw himself as a growing boy with her standing at his bedside the way one's mother does before one goes to sleep.

"How do I come to know that?" he wondered. "Certainly nobody ever did it for me."

As though she had guessed everything he

was thinking, and sympathized with him, she said, "I've spent too much time travelling. Too many irrelevant things have occupied me. I should have known you long ago." Then she gazed past him and forgot to close her lips.

Why, she asked herself, yes, why had she suddenly thought of the baby at that moment.

Half of her life had been as nothing and then suddenly she seemed to remember everything clearly. She moved among the faces of the past, the house with no neighbors near, the baby lying there so small, and then, Oh God, the reflection of the fountained water playing around his head. . . . She raised her large eyes to him and questioned him about his childhood. Had it been a good time? Had he been a happy child?

"Indeed it had," he said. She drew a long breath.

"Tell me about it," she said.

"Gladly. It was summertime," he began. "I always think of myself in summer, at Klein-Wendrin, that's our estate. It was a Sunday. No, I seem to see myself in linen and on Sundays I wore silk instead."

She leaned forward. "Really?" she said

tensely. "It would have been different with me," she said, disappointed perhaps, perhaps pleased. But at that moment the swinging door was opened and they had to go in to supper.

They talked about other things during supper. But afterwards, while they were sitting quietly, he began again of his own accord with the very word he had left off at, Sunday.

It had been a Sunday. The children from the neighboring estate had come with their tutor. They were all doing stunts. He had boasted about a difficult trick he could do. He had been a dreadful braggart then. Then he'd failed at the stunt and everybody laughed at him for it.

He was unlucky in love, too. He was fourteen and the little girl was twelve, but even at that early age she had been betrothed to her cousin whom he didn't know. He still remembered clearly how terribly this incident had affected him, like the opening up of another world to which he could never attain and with which he was not permitted to speak. He had tossed a whole night in the wildest ex-

citement and the next day had pushed his beloved little girl into a bramble bush out of wounded pride.

"But you think I'm only telling you about the unhappy things," he said. "I wasn't even aware, though, that I was very unhappy. It seems blissful compared with what came later on in life.

"The best of all was certainly my friendship. At that time I could still give myself with perfect confidence," said the twenty-five year old man.

His friend used to come from the city to see him, come all the way on foot, if he didn't have the carfare. He was poor. He had worked his way through school and before that he had even supported his brothers and sisters.

"What did he become finally?" she asked.

"A Communist. He had worked too early and too hard," Valentine said by way of apology. At present he was considered one of the most dangerous. They had nothing to do with one another any more.

At that time Wernawe had been the more sensible of the two. "I was all for midnight walks and fantastics," Valentine said, "and

our life really began after everyone else in Klein-Wendrin was fast asleep. I used to make him miss the last train. Then we were left alone in the world and the time had come to talk about such things as nobody else had ever talked about before. The tall grasses listened to our opinions on life. The dark pond at the edge of the woods heard the poems we recited out loud and accepted them as it did the stars.

"In the gray dawn, our arms swinging in time with our words, we'd walk back to the city side by side. And though I was nearly dead with weariness I'd come right home again." He wondered whether or not he ought to go on.

"There was one trip home that was more strange than any of the others," he said. "As usual I had pleaded with him to drop everything else and come back with me. This time he gave in. He boarded the train with me. Such joy overwhelmed me that I was afraid of myself. 'You shouldn't love him so much,' I kept thinking, 'It's not right. You'll lose him.' So I turned away from him and sat looking out of the opposite window. But I was listening eagerly for the slightest move he

might make. I didn't hear anything but when I finally did look around again he was gone. I often met him afterwards but I'd really lost him at that moment, I really lost him then," he repeated.

She began to talk while he was in the midst of his own reminiscences. "When I was a girl I knew a young priest." She said it gently. She failed to penetrate his thoughts.

"There were both Germans and Italians living in the valleys," she went on. "A soldier brought home a girl from beyond the glacier that divided them. Then his time of service was up and he never came back again.

"The strange girl was alone in the hut when I was born. She was the only soul in the whole village, all the others having fled from the swelling March torrents. We were lucky, though, and the water stopped rising when it reached our door. It was Saint Felicitas' day and I was named for her and for my mother, Mary Felicitas.

"They gave me shelter but my life was nothing but drudgery for others. As a child I used to have to carry the water jugs up the steep valley stairs and into the houses. For this they

taught me that my mother was a bad woman. The peasants made me work until I would drop down in the straw from weariness. One day, when a gendarme brought my mother back, I expected to be driven into the snow-fields along with her, but the young priest saved us.

"I thought he was an angel then and even now I seem to see something of the angel in him. From then on I was his creature, believing absolutely in him. I used to herd the goats and once I stepped out suddenly from behind a bush in order to kiss his hand. I thought that he looked terrified. But I had boundless faith in him. The more vehemently he spoke of sin, the greater seemed what he had done for us. I sank down on my knees in front of him. How excited I was when I found out that he could see me even when I was alone.

"His house was built partly out of the natural rocks, like most of those around us. The path to it led behind the church and through the dark mountains. I was fifteen years old before I first dared to follow the path. My teeth chattered for fear of the bogies which I thought I saw. It was a long while

before I recognized the green fires I saw in front of me as the eyes of the young priest's cat.

"In order to get past him, I said, 'Go way, Gog,' and in my flurry, I pulled open the door of the house. I could see nothing but a kind of radiance, I could not see the priest. He was blotted out by the sudden brightness so that he was invisible to me. At the same time I found courage to tell him why I had come. I had to confess a theft, I told him. But he only said to me, 'Do you think God lets Himself be deceived?' He knew even the feelings I was hiding from him.

"No one should be permitted such power for no one is strong enough for it. I know now that I was in a trance. I hung my head and he stroked the hair out of my eyes. I let my head fall on my shoulder and it lay there with the eyes closed, it lay there for him. But I was in a trance and never thought that I would see him or see the world again. When I looked up again he was gone."

"Like my friend," said Valentine.

"But I went there again," she said, "his room was nearly dark. Under the crucifix a black cloak was lying on a chair. It hung in

folds and looked shriveled and empty. I crept up to it and kissed it. His voice asked, 'Is that you, Gog?' It was he, not only his cassock. I meowed so that he would keep on thinking it was Gog. Meowing softly, I crept away for I had succeeded in deceiving him.

"That was the end. I thought that it was the end of me, too, and I wanted to die. Oh, what a life and death struggle I had before I confessed everything to him! But he took what had happened to me as a special grace granted to him. He had had to protect himself against a great temptation. Darkly I grasped what his temptation had been and that not only could he be deceived but that he had need of deception. . . . That was the beginning of my life," she said after two little pauses which followed one on the other, while she looked up surprised that she should have told it at all.

Then she perceived that his eyes, too, were peering into the depths like those from which she was emerging. Was he peering at the beginnings of his own life? And not at hers at all? Yet both were so marvellously alike in pattern.

She smoothed his forehead above his eyes.

Chapter Three

EVERYONE should have been in bed by the time Valentine finally got home. Nevertheless he saw a light coming from between the shutters of the music-room windows. He therefore took no particular pains to open the house door quietly.

He crossed the drawing-room and suddenly the light was no longer there. Something fell down with a crash.

Valentine stepped quickly into the music-room. The glass connecting door was ajar and quivering a little as though it had just been opened.

He put out his hand to turn on the lights but checked himself in time. Holding both hands in front of him, he went out of the room. It was perfectly dark so that he had to feel his way at every step. It was this darkness that made his game with the marauder so exciting.

Then someone tripped over a piece of furniture. It was behind him; he was on the wrong track. Whoever it was was in the draw-

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ing-room. He must have slipped past Valentine near the glass connecting door which had been quivering. Valentine kept on going and left the music-room. Once in the corridor he was back at the drawing-room door again in two bounds.

He was barely inside the door before he sensed a shadow disappearing into the other room. He could not hear a footfall but the shadow seemed wafted towards him. Then he ran after it in pursuit of the fugitive.

What was wafted towards him was no marauder's shadow. In his heart of hearts Valentine knew from that moment onwards what was taking place. He merely let it go on because it was so much more exciting that way.

Once out in the hall again, he ought simply to have gone upstairs to his mansard. But he didn't do that either the first or the second time. Instead he ran in a circle through the darkness so long that the breathing of the person he was pursuing became clearly audible.

At last he stood still. A feeble sobbing was all he heard. At the same moment she sank down. Valentine would have given anything to be able to go upstairs but he didn't dare to now.

He simply turned on the lamp which had the thickest shade, but it could not prevent him from seeing that the poor little thing was standing there naked and trembling.

She kept her burning face buried in both white hands so that it was almost entirely hidden by them. Her bare knees trembled and she was near to falling. And indeed she would have fallen backwards across the great bronze and marble table in her wild efforts to escape Valentine, and might have hurt or even killed herself. He had to catch her quickly.

Her shoulders kept throbbing for a while in his embrace. Then they, too, grew quiet. Her body lay exhausted against him, Valentine holding it upright.

He grew bolder and kissed her but she did not respond. But the mouth on which his lips rested for so long did not resist him either. His hands pleaded even more eloquently but her body answered only with rigidity and silence. Valentine felt a sense of modesty, a sort of brotherliness, moving him, a feeling of privity, even before he perceived that she had fainted.

Then he carried her into her own room. He lifted her as he would a doll and set her on

a chair. He began to cut little figures out of paper. While he was glancing up to compare her figure with the one he was cutting, she came to again. The glance she laid on him was full of meaning.

"Were we playing?" she asked him.

He realized that she remembered nothing or preferred not to remember.

"We were having a wonderful time," he said, "but your mind wandered to something else for a moment, Princess."

She clapped her hands and picked up the last figure he had cut out.

"It's I," she cried. "It's I. Quick, let me have the others, too. That one's you, Valentine. And this one . . . no . . . I won't let it be she. I tell you it mustn't be the woman with the big blue automobile."

"But there's her automobile, too," he said, seeming to enchant it out of the paper as he spoke. "Don't you worry about it though, Excellency."

"But suppose she gets into the auto with him!"

"Oh, well, suppose she does," he said, "they won't go away together. In fact they're coming in your direction. The woman is bring-

ing the Princess her Valentine. She is saying, 'I'm his mother, or as good as a mother to him anyway. I'll be your mother, too, little Highness,' she is saying, 'you're going to be happy and forget all the things that aren't nice.' "

And there really was no recollection in those baby blue eyes. Princess Adele took the figure of Valentine away from the strange woman and pushed her to one side. Then she looked at them, enchanted by the lovely story he had made up. And Valentine perceived that as long as everything came out all right for her in stories, she would soon forget the sour lees of life.

At that moment the Professor entered. He had thrown a coat hastily over his pyjamas. He had the pale puffy face of an old man who has been suddenly waked up from sleep. His eyes looked really terrified.

"What is going on here?" he asked.

"Give me a chance to tell you," said Valentine, "and I will. I came home and heard someone crying. You must have slept pretty sound not to have heard it, too. So I waited behind the door but the crying only grew louder. Finally I saw that it wasn't going to stop so I walked in."

"And how did you find her?" the professor asked huskily. They eyed one another in silence.

"You ought to take better care of her, Professor." Valentine said this in all seriousness. Then his tone grew light. "The Princess was sitting there sound asleep," he said.

The old tutor breathed a sigh of relief. Moreover what Valentine told him had not been so far from the truth. What he described really had happened one Sunday when everybody else was out. The Princess was alone and Valentine had caught her unawares. Only he had not succeeded in seeing her that time. She did not want him to, though he did not then understand why. Her door was locked when he tried it and the keyhole was covered. . . .

It was since that Sunday that the General's wife had come to believe that he was the Princess' lover. It made Valentine smile.

The Professor saw it all and was terrified anew. He saw his whole life's work threatened, his child profaned. For she was more his child than if he himself had been her father. She was much more his handiwork than any of the irrelevant acts of his life.

This forgetful creature, shunted now here, now there, like a puppet, has been left destitute; he thought, it is for you, Professor Wunder, to take her part even against the whole world. You must take her part and you must shield her, too, for she's not altogether without her faults and should not, perhaps, be too closely scrutinized.

Valentine heard the professor whispering to him, "Whatever you may know . . ."

"I'll keep to myself," Valentine completed the sentence for him. It gave the Professor fresh courage to plead with him.

"Have pity on her," he begged.

For answer, Valentine pointed to the Princess playing with her dolls. She was making the woman with the blue automobile drive ahead to bring the figure of Valentine to the Princess' doll. Then she made her say that both of them would be happy. The Princess felt joyful herself. Her long thin arms moved in the most beautiful gestures.

The next morning the President called. The General's wife was not dressed so early in the day and she was forced to leave him alone in the drawing-room a few minutes. The Princess was playing the piano in the next room.

"The General has gone out," thought his wife, "and so has the Professor. The Princess must be alone at the piano. It's only a question of whether or not Seehase will open the connecting door. And he will. He isn't accustomed to denying himself anything he wants. Be crafty, my dear Ina! It begins to look as though the Princess might yet become one of the most painful dreams in the President's long life. It would be a crime not to make the most of that chance, Ina, my child. It's the way of the world."

She went down to meet him and there sure enough was the President standing by the piano. And what on earth was he doing? He was singing, the President was singing.

He had entered with some hesitation and said, "Princess, if your Highness will be mine, I'll absolutely guarantee to make you the greatest singer in the world."

"Oh, can you sing, too?" asked the Princess. It was one of her perfectly irrelevant questions but it confused the President. For a moment he was no longer sure himself whether or not one of the conditions of his promise was that he must sing too. The Princess gave him the key and he joined in.

"Ah, my dear President," said the General's wife, her eyes sparkling brightly, "Are you singing, 'Fox, You've Stolen the Goose' so soon? A captain of industry like you!"

She led him a little to one side.

"Don't give in to all the Princess' whims, my dear friend," she said, "they might carry you too far."

He wanted to cover his embarrassment and became brutal. "How much do you want?" he said. "Yes, I'm asking what your price is to have your son step out of the picture. I'm going to take over the Princess."

The General's wife smiled pityingly but she remained affable. She didn't need money just then.

"That's a recent development," he said. He had noticed it even in the servant who opened the door for him. She had suddenly got means from somewhere. She would pay the entire back rent at once.

"And just when you were thinking that you had everyone right in the hollow of your hand," the General's wife went on.

"Where can you have got money from?" he asked, wrinkling up his forehead in a deep scowl. Suddenly his steel-blue eyes opened

wide. His glance struck the General's wife like a blow but she did not blench from it.

"Fortunately the days of petty speculating are over," he said in the hope that she might answer something, "of course, there's still bridge and baccarat. Haven't you paid the rent with them before?" His eyes had narrowed again. "If we weren't all the very best people, I could put my finger on a certain middle-aged lady who's in love," he went on.

"In love with whom?" He met this question from the General's wife with a final shrug of the shoulders. He attempted to kiss the Princess' hand but she made it hard for him. His lips had to pursue her flying fingers along the keys and peck at them.

"Do you know a Baroness Hartmann?" the General's wife said to him in the drawing-room as he was leaving.

He stood still. "No," he said, so that she might tell him more.

"I met her accidentally at one of the embassies," she said, emphasizing the I. "She's sympathetic and her house has style. But is she possible as a connection? No one seems to know anything about her." At the same time she was thinking, "If he'd known her

he would have come right out with it. I'll be forced to ask someone from her own circle after all."

"Hartmann?" the President muttered. "Hartmann, hold on now. Everything's not quite right there. There was some sort of scandal about her at one time or another," he declared suddenly.

"Were you mixed up in it?" the General's wife asked without stopping to think.

He drew back. "What!" he said. "No. It came to me by hearsay. Someone pointed her out to me once. I don't know her personally."

"Well, what you say about her is more than likely," said the General's wife. "In such circles every one has had his scandal." She emphasized the word circles.

The President refused the inference. He bowed and left. But he decided to see this Baroness Hartmann. He knew nothing but good about her. But how did she come to be financing the General's whole family and actually forcing him out of business? It was intolerable.

The General's wife remained standing on one spot. "He knows her," she was thinking. "He's been mixed up in some scandal with

her. It was a whisper from heaven itself made me ask. I wonder how much the further details would be worth if I could offer them to Seehase? Together with what the General knows about some of his earlier business ventures, I believe that a fortune could be made out of it," she thought, her avarice rising.

She looked in the glass and saw her eyes sparkling. "I'm walking over drawn swords," she said aloud under cover of the Princess' sweet sing-song in the next room. "The old times are gone," she thought with a forceful sweep of her hand. "This Hartmann woman has already paid a good part of our debts though of course the General doesn't know anything about it. I alone am responsible. The mistake lay in not doing it long ago. We were out of step with the times."

She peered into the mirror, incredulous. "And to think that I'm Ina Schollendorff!" she said.

She felt suddenly desolate and wished that the General were back. Why was he away so much these days? She knew him, he was trying to escape those painful problems that life kept posing, but which, nevertheless, kept troubling him day and night. He would never

have believed that questions which served no practicable purpose that he could see, could so completely have taken possession of him.

The bare assertion of an unknown woman that she was Valentine's mother was the next thing to hallucination, if not madness, and was hardly worth a shrug of the shoulders. And yet it was precisely for that reason that he found the idea so exciting. The life of this fifty-four year old man was running in a rut and promised not the slightest element of surprise again until his death.

But even supposing that she were Valentine's mother, what right did she have to him now anyway? What concern was he of hers after twenty-five years had gone by? "But I, on the other hand, for twenty-five years have never known whom I had under my roof," he thought, "granting that it's all true."

Then he saw that as far as he himself was concerned anything was possible for he had never really known more than that there was someone else called Vogel von Lambart in the house. And who was this other person really? What was he becoming, or to put it more exactly, what was becoming of him? The General now made his first attempts to

follow out the intimate life of that other Vogel von Lambart and he was compelled to admit that, however brief it might have been, it had known heavy troubles.

"I'm not a barbarian," he thought. "I've long been aware that life is no bed of roses for the young folk of today."

Yes, but how about his own son? His own Valentine? At heart he was a stranger to him, after all.

He recollected the various stages in the boy's life and compared them with his own at the same age. "Would I have been able to go through with it?" he asked himself. "I was coddled, I may as well confess it. Even my ambition was of a more elegant and pampered sort, which let coarse men get ahead of me. And just when I was on the verge of advancing in His Majesty's favor, my face got fat and then it was all over with me. That's what I call a real blow of fate but the blows that came later have turned my liver. If I had been a certain other person I wonder if I should not have kept better tempered through it all."

He lectured himself. Of course, he hadn't helped his son very much. But what son ever

was helped by his parents? The trouble was in this case that disaster had overtaken the parents first. But was the War such a great disaster, after all?

"We didn't think it was so much then," he said, "quite the contrary, although we never wanted it. I didn't want it. The individual didn't want it. Did the world as a whole want it, though? And am I to be responsible to my son for the world's misdeeds merely because I happened to come into the world before him?"

At this point his thoughts grew silent, as though his brain were paralyzed. But as the sense of crampedness diminished, he said, "Responsibility! . . . After all it's nothing but a word. A man can very easily bring misfortune on his own child. And it can't be helped either. Not that that justifies me," he thought more gently, and then again, with emphasis, "I must do my duty in life as it is, that's all that's left."

At that point he broke off, he always broke off at that point.

When Valentine happened to be sitting in front of him, all these thoughts were much vaguer. The actual presence of the young man

rather soothed him. It almost succeeded in convincing the General that every one gets what he needs here on earth.

"Besides," he thought, "youth knows nothing but what is here and now." He made an attempt to find out if his son still remembered a time in his childhood when they had had money. There had been a time when the General used to buy him the biggest and most expensive toys. The truth was that he was deceiving his wife then and would not spend a cent of their money on themselves but only on the child. He had not forgotten those happy times.

But no, Valentine did not remember them any more. The general was angry with himself for asking. Then his glance encountered the portrait of the boy on the wall, the happy-go-lucky boy who, in 1915, was joyfully awaiting the time when he would be old enough to volunteer. And what had happened since then? Was it the loss of their fortune? It was much, much more than that. His joy in living was gone. All his confident anticipation and his trust. What was there to trust in now? In life? "But life," he thought, "is no longer for such as I."

Crazy thoughts, thoughts so crazy that even what was true in them deserved to be rejected in the name of sanity. On the other hand, one couldn't possibly simply shut one's self to all the life around one, or better say all that was being lived around us, not even to what was false and unreal. The fantastic claims of that unknown woman forced themselves in on him again.

"Whatever can have put it into her head?" he asked his wife.

The General's wife was surprised. "Why, didn't you ever hear the story about the baby and the fountain before?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "I mean how does it happen that she should come to think of it just at this particular time?"

"Perhaps she was waiting until she had enough money," she answered.

"Money for what?" asked the General, wrinkling his forehead. And the conversation ended there.

He took it up again, however. "You don't keep quiet for ten years if there's a fixed idea in your mind," he said. "It must just have come over her."

His wife had no opinion on the matter. He

himself was forced to come out with the commonplace. "It's what's called remorse," he said.

"What?" said the General's wife. She raised her eyebrows suddenly.

"Her conscience is troubling her," he went on impatiently. "I suppose she suddenly became conscious of what responsibility means."

His wife listened politely. "Do you think so?" she said as he grew silent. "I can think of several simpler motives myself. She's looking for social connections for one thing." The General's wife cited an example, the Councillor von X, who, in the middle of the winter season, had suddenly been visited by a perfect stranger who claimed she was a relative of his. "About the same age as our friend," she said with an acid smile. "That's the age for them. Now there are high doings at the Councillor's though nobody could have been in much worse shape. Both his daughters have married since.

"Of course, it's all perfectly clear," the General's wife went on, "it's a simple matter of an understanding between the councillor and the woman. Baroness Hartmann has ambitions to get into good society through us,

though she's clever enough not to take us for a Councillor von X. Hence her complicated approach. You'll soon see what her next move will be."

It was not hard for the General's wife to prophesy. Baroness Hartmann's desire to be received had already been conveyed to her and she had refused. Since then Valentine had got all the money which had paid their debts.

The General, however, was thinking that it was "all a pure invention, the whole story about the maid servant and the baby. And yet, as often as he had himself denied it, he felt at that moment that it had taken firm hold of him. To deny everything mysterious, every touch of a destiny, at once dark and unfamiliar, was to deny the very depths of life itself. That, to the General's mind, was emptiness and folly. As for himself, he felt that one ought to make an effort to avoid the Schollendorff atmosphere. If occasionally he let it be seen that he did so, it was with so much tact that only an eye with a quarter century of practice could detect it.

At times it seemed to the General that the Schollendorff way of doing things was not

above suspicion and was even a little weird. What proof was there after all that he had not been deceived with a substituted child? Common sense, of course, told him that this couldn't be true, and by common sense he meant habit, comfort and one's bounden duty to respect one's own wife. But suppose that one really had a different attitude towards one's wife? Long ago his wife had shown signs of a nature that . . . the General did not finish his sentence. He had wanted to subdue this woman's unscrupulous will. But whenever we stop short we like to blame it on the superior will power of others who might be glad enough to have even the little will we have ourselves. The General thought this over too, before he went on.

Whatever else might be, this much was certain, that Ina had ruthlessly defended her marriage when it was threatened. She had been no sacrificial lamb. The child must be his own since he had wanted it with all his heart. It had come at a time when his impatience with his wife was growing dangerous. It had come when his hope was about gone. But why had there never been any more?

"Happy as I then was, it was probably

very easy to deceive me about her pregnancy," he thought, though shrinking back again in alarm. "These Hamburg women!"

Meanwhile he made sure that the doctor was still alive. He had not only delivered the General's wife but had treated her afterwards. The General got as far as the doctor's house. He did not get any farther. The doctor was an old man by now, full of titles and honors, a respectable personage. Could he go up to him and ask him if he had committed a criminal act twenty-five years ago? Once and for all, no, the General decided.

Relinquishing the doctor, he bethought himself of the midwife. He found that she had disappeared from Berlin and had later changed her address several times and was now no longer traceable. She was facing a jail sentence for certain illicit business, so that she was unquestionably capable of having substituted the child. At last the General felt that he was on firm ground.

With the help of detectives, he began a hunt for the midwife. He devoted himself passionately to this task. Regularly he missed his meals only to appear later, haggard and excited, before his wife. And it was not until

her startled eyes rested on him that he realized what he was really doing. He was working for her destruction. He was terrified, never having intended it in that way. Probably it all came about because he had too much idle time on his hands. Now after his forays in search of the elusive midwife, he would bring his wife candy and flowers.

The range of his inquiries began to widen, as it could not help doing. If Baroness Hartmann really was Valentine's mother what use had she made of the fact all this time? None at all until very recently. There certainly was a puzzle here somewhere. Perhaps she had had a hand in the heavy losses they had suffered. The General began to have doubts about his earlier relations with the President. How did it happen that he had become Seehase's general manager? Why did Seehase keep Valentine on in spite of the misunderstanding between them? The very foundation of things was shattered if the President and the Baroness knew one another. They would lie, of course, but the General could ask Kappus.

He had discovered Kappus' connection with the Baroness Hartmann. Undoubtedly the

money had passed through his hands. The General decided that the time for settling accounts had come.

"Kappus," he said to the banker, "you and I have known one another a pretty long time. But, as one man to another, let me tell you that what you are doing is treacherous." He would not allow himself to be interrupted. "You're subsidizing my son, Valentine," he said, "and you've been doing it in every imaginable way for years. You must have very peculiar reasons for doing such a thing. I want you to tell me what they are. For I don't mind telling you that I won't stand for any more of this sort of hide and seek."

The General did not finish his threat, Kappus looked at him so simply. The shrewd and experienced man laid his hand on his heart in the simplest way imaginable. "May I die," he said, "if what you say is true." He had never heard of such a thing before.

"All I know," he said, "is that there are gambling debts." He did not say whose. "I also know that your wife, for whom I have the greatest respect, owns a remarkably handsome necklace of brilliants and turquoises, large turquoises. Such things aren't being

worn any longer, but an intimate acquaintance of mine, a woman, is interested in jewels. She would like to look at the necklace. She wants to visit you for that purpose."

What answer could he make? The Baroness meant to repay herself in this way for Valentine's gambling debts. The General was in no position to refuse her offer. Besides, he could not stand it any longer. The unknown woman was gradually occupying all his thoughts. Let her come. Let her come in person at last. He spoke to his wife of the proposed visit.

His wife was delighted. For days past she had not dared to give the final word, though Valentine, as the Baroness Hartmann's representative, was pressing her. Baroness Hartmann had done them considerable services and had a right, when all was said and done, to demand her price. For form's sake, the General's wife suggested certain difficulties. She let him see what she suspected of his state of mind. In the end, all responsibility for the final step must be on him alone.

Only the General's wife saw the big blue automobile drive up, though she said nothing about it. Today would be an acid test for all

of them, the more surely since everything would be impromptu. Even the President had not been told whom he might meet there. If only he would come!

A card was brought in. "Felicie," read the General's wife, "the accent over the 'e' fell a victim to the War, I notice."

She met her opponent standing. As Baroness Hartmann entered the drawing-room her walk revealed a number of things to the General's wife. She scarcely took time to notice from what shops these clothes had come. What she observed was a remnant of exoticism, expressed in the naïveté of the Baroness' walk, and a certain assurance which was lacking in her taste. But it was her beauty itself which betrayed the woman's origins. And beauty it certainly was, though beauty of a coarse kind, thought the General's wife, as Valentine, and even the General himself, so assiduously kissed her hand. There were no fragile bones beneath it and there was no nobility in the features. The eyes, under their regular arched brows, were too large and placid and her pale, smooth skin had been unblemished by any spiritual crises in her youth. All her features had retained their

simplicity and she was remarkably well preserved for her age.

"She's really not a day younger than I am," thought the General's wife, "but what do I look like beside her?"

The General's wife could have sworn that that splendid hair done loose over her forehead had been a much deeper red in the old adventurous days. In her old fleshly days. Then, as her hair grew darker there had come other adventures, adventures of the heart, so to speak. But the General's wife did not put any great faith in them either. Everything about the Baroness Hartmann prepared her for relapses in the realm of the flesh.

Both the men held aloof. They respected the first onset of these female powers. Meanwhile Baroness Hartmann ate quantities of sandwiches and tea. She did not care to open the battle. The Baroness was aware of everything the General's wife had decided as she walked up the room. She sensed, too, that it would be perfectly in keeping with the other woman's idea of her if she ate too many sandwiches. That was why she took them.

She recognized her foe at first glance, and knew, too, that everything that resisted her

in Valentine had its roots in this same source.

"I gave up my child to her a long, long time ago," she thought, "to this woman with wispy hair, and those nervous, sparkling eyes and teeth!" Her large pale nose implied no good, but, above all, it was her bad teeth, all of them gold-filled, that distressed one so. Baroness Hartmann felt the hostility of the other woman in an almost physical way. She also recognized that she would have to exercise extreme self-control.

The General's wife had something quite different on her mind, however, and, after a few rather embarrassed words, she said somewhat to her own surprise, "Everyone seems to be in business these days, and such business! Will you believe me, Baroness, when I tell you that I had to defend myself today against a woman who wanted to buy my husband? Would you believe it, the woman wanted to be the General's wife. It seems to be a regular practice nowadays. The rising classes are buying up good relations." She spoke in a conversational tone, but bitingly.

The General tried to smooth things over. He was extremely polite. "You had your villa near the Zoölogical Gardens a long time be-

fore the recent troubles, didn't you, Baroness?" he said. "I know because at one time when things were a little less tight financially I had my eye on it myself. It seemed to stand vacant for a long time."

That was because she had been travelling a good deal at that time, the Baroness Hartmann said. She saw how deeply Valentine had blushed in his confusion. She understood how ashamed he felt for what had been said, as though she herself, and not the General's wife, were to blame for the unpleasantness.

She continued talking to the General at the same time that she was sizing him up. He was a weak man, far too thoughtful for his wife. And it was because of this same quality of thoughtfulness that he had no woman friend, she thought, much as he probably wanted one. Surely he was no very determined opponent, Baroness Hartmann decided. Especially not now when he was secretly critical of his wife's methods.

"But she's right," the Baroness conceded in her thoughts, "his wife defends what she has. I'll never be able to pay her enough for it."

Nevertheless, she hated the woman. More even than the other hated her, she feared.

Everyone sensed what was taking place and the conversation lagged. The General's wife finally took to complimenting her guest on her clothes. In the process she paid special attention to her visitor's teeth, those pearly, flawless teeth, marshalled in her wide mouth whose lips slid easily over them in speaking. Their attraction for the General's wife was almost irresistible.

Suddenly she broke off in the middle of a sentence about hats. "How are your teeth, Baroness?" she asked.

The smooth skin colored for the first time. Baroness Hartmann lifted her hand. No one knew what she was going to do, she did not know herself.

"Oh, they can still hang on to things," she said, and rapped loudly against her teeth with the knuckles of her clenched hand.

The General's wife drew back in her chair. "Horrible," she thought. "She's a wild beast."

The stranger looked shocked herself. She had meant to control herself, and at the very outset this had happened which never should have occurred.

At the height of the panic, the President strode in. He helped to ease the tension some-

what with his slow gestures and his limp. Baroness Hartmann saw him through a haze as he was being introduced to her. But his very first words were enough to make them understand each other. He said something about her automobile which had remained standing on the drive. But he omitted to say some of the things he would have said about it to the General's wife.

Presently the conversation got around to the business crisis and unemployment. Baroness Hartmann asked him how many men he was planning to discharge in the next few days. The others saw that they were going to talk business. With her the President lost that social tone which he employed even when quarreling with the General's wife.

Seehase glumly admitted what he could not deny. Then he began to boast. It would be an entirely different sort from him who would fail. But whoever tried to retrench now was done for anyway. They seemed to reach the same general conclusions, though in an unpleasant way. It seemed to her that she must once before have somewhere spoken abruptly to this man, but it was all dark as in a dream.

The General's wife was on pins and needles.

Any lack of consideration shown herself she could make up for by her superior tact and breeding. But unpleasantness between strangers boded no good and she would not have it. She looked around for help but her husband and Valentine still held aloof. She had one last resort, she rang for tea.

The young servant they had recently hired went to carry out his instructions by calling the Princess to tea. Presently she appeared followed by the Professor. And in an instant that business tone left the President's voice. It was he who pulled up the Princess' chair for her. But she insisted on drawing Valentine's chair next to hers. The President simply moved nearer so that all three were sitting in a knot. The eyes of the General's wife encountered the Baroness Hartmann's astonished glance and smiled at her with a look which seemed to say, "I'll explain it all to you later on."

As far as the President was concerned there was nothing to explain. He had grown quite pale when the Princess came in but was now red in the face and was no longer entirely master of his movements. How all those features which life had furrowed so deeply

obeyed the slightest unconscious move the Princess made. It was strange to see his eyes become somehow pleading while remaining hard. The Baroness Hartmann saw it and thought, "I must know him from somewhere —but where?"

The little shorn maiden (her hair had been bobbed again) sat straight and slender in her chair as she crossed her long legs, her gay smile coming and going while she chattered imbecilities which only the President took seriously. It seemed to Valentine that she was somewhat less incoherent than usual and he asked himself how that had happened. Some clarifying process was going on in the Princess' mind. He wondered what could have caused it.

But in his heart he sensed what it was. And he was filled with tenderness towards her, if not with love. What is one to do if a creature one recently cared for and shielded on a certain night is grateful to one, albeit she has forgotten exactly what took place. Perhaps it was because she was in love that she spoke less senselessly today. And it is you, Valentine, who have wrought this miracle, you who despaired of all miracles, he thought. He felt

almost happy. Not only could he disregard the President, who was treading on his foot, but for a moment even Felicie, who sat there watching him, did not trouble him.

Perhaps it was just because Felicie was watching him that he paid all the more attention to the Princess. He did not stop to distinguish all the feelings going on within him. But his gray eyes grew brighter, so brightly shone that pair of baby blue ones.

The General's wife was still on pins and needles. It was impossible for the Baroness Hartmann not to see what was going on, although she exercised a commendable control. Surely it was not what she would have wanted. . . .

The General's wife interrupted abruptly. "I believe you and I have some things to talk over, Baroness," she said. Baroness Hartmann understood her meaning and went with her.

She led the way through the dining-room into her boudoir. While the General's wife was opening the jewel-case, the Baroness suddenly said to her, "This is the side wall of the house. On the other side the bedroom runs to the back. Your ground floor is not very high. If someone stood behind the house

he would be able to see in as far as this room. He could if he stood between the two little plum-trees," she concluded.

The General's wife gave a quick glance towards the trees. Of course, they weren't there. They had died and been carted away years ago. The General's wife shuddered.

"Here is the necklace," she said. Then it was that it first occurred to her to say, "You're quite right. It's been too easy for thieves to get in here. But we're well armed."

The Baroness kept silent, she did not even seem to hear. She no longer felt herself present in the room. It seemed to her as if she were standing behind the house. And it was night. And it was cold. One of those wretched, bitter cold nights of long ago. She peered in vain through the drawn curtains, guessing at the shadows that passed across them, listening for some sound from the poor beloved baby she had abandoned to them. Abandoned to them, to them, to them! To the surprise of the General's wife, Baroness Hartmann suddenly took several quite unconscious steps. Then by a perceptible effort she recovered her thoughts from who knows what long-past and questionable experience.

"Pardon me," she said to the General's wife, "if I seem somewhat more curious than one usually is on a first visit, but is the portrait of the boy in the drawing-room . . ." she struggled with the word, "is it Valentine?"

She was told that it was, but it did not satisfy her. "And that figure on the big center table . . . ?" she asked.

"The Youth?" asked the General's wife, pricking up her ears.

"That's he, too," said the Baroness, "I saw the resemblance at once. He's like it even yet."

The General's wife bit her lip. She was accustomed to being the only one who saw that, and even she seldom noticed it any more. Who was this woman to whom Valentine was still like that slender figure which had been standing there before ever he had come into the world. She felt a tremor coming over her again, but determined not to let herself be flurried this time. When all was said and done every one of them knew what this woman wanted from them.

"Won't you please look at the necklace?" she said dryly.

The Baroness reached for it, but drew back

her outstretched hand as suddenly as if the necklace had been red hot.

"Is this little Princess rich?" she asked.

So that was how things stood and she really didn't know anything. The General's wife congratulated herself on not having broached this delicate subject herself. "Very rich," she said.

She breathed heavily once or twice. "After the government compensation she'll be a good deal richer still," she went on. "She's out of the question, of course, as far as Valentine's concerned."

"Of course?" the Baroness echoed inquiringly. "I don't see why. It's only a question of rank and position with him, as far as I can see."

Wasn't she going to be jealous, after all? The General's wife naturally expected that she would attack the Princess. Instead of that, it was the Baroness herself who was accepting the girl, though perhaps with a shade of sadness in her voice. It appeared that she was ambitious for Valentine. Her own objects were in the line of business first and last. The General's wife had grasped it all in the first place. She had only to recollect what she'd said then.

"What an idea, to expect jealousy from her!" she thought. "On the other hand she'll go so far in her need for social connections as to bring Valentine a dowry. But the Princess will get hers from the President. How it all dovetails," thought the General's wife, although with a wry smile for the whole hang of things and her own part in them.

"The President . . ." the Baroness began at that moment.

"The President's also mixed up in it," the General's wife broke in suddenly, "he also enjoys saying, 'Princess.'"

She laughed politely, letting her laugh convey her meaning. "You see," she went on, "there's no danger to a snob. Up to a certain point, you can let Seehase go as far as he likes." "You're pandering, Ina, my child," she thought, "and God knows but you've hooked this lady."

Baroness Hartmann observed nothing of all this. Her heavy eyes were fixed on the General's wife, eyes which saw nothing. The General's wife was rather uneasy, fearing what might come next. "I must have known him somewhere," was all that came, however.

"You know the President?" asked the other.

"You don't say so?" she said indifferently.

"It's impossible to remember all the faces one meets," said the Baroness, "but I remember seeing this one somewhere at night."

"It must have been a heavenly night," said the General's wife, laughing merrily.

"Guard the Princess well," the Baroness said suddenly and her voice sounded threatening.

"What have I to do?" asked the General's wife. "She has her tutor."

The Baroness Hartmann hardly let her finish the sentence. No one in the whole ménage had made her so impatient as the poor Professor. "What a creature he is!" she said, "he lets the girl flirt and prattle. He says things that he doesn't believe while he's saying them and he expects young men to listen to him in the very act of seducing a young girl." The motions she made with her hands had shocked the Professor and, in fact, there were few things more ugly.

"The President is dangerous," she began again. But at that moment Valentine appeared through the portières. His manner was apologetic.

"Pardon me," he said, "if I disturb you

a moment. The President isn't feeling well. We've put him on the divan."

He withdrew. The General's wife lifted the curtain after him. Baroness Hartmann was close behind her. Both looked at the way Valentine and the Professor had laid out the patient.

The President's eyes were shut, but apparently only from pain. The scowl on his face, the wrinkles on his forehead, were painfully rigid. Now that sickness had taken the life and intelligence from his features, his face was that of some aged animal. The flesh around his mouth was sunk and drawn by his terrible suffering.

"It's he," someone said. "It's he!" The voice sounded harsh and far away and the General's wife did not realize at first who had said those words so close to her.

"Who is it?" she asked without turning around.

"He tricked him in court," the voice went on.

"Who?"

"His friend."

"Someone you were fond of?"

There was no answer to this. The Gener-

al's wife took a step forward and was on the other side of the curtain. She still held it parted, though, gazing at that horrible mask. Then she let it fall between her and the face.

The General's wife felt ground beneath her feet at last and stepped lightly. So that was how things stood. This woman had been fond of a man but the President had worked against her lover in some legal business. The notorious case of the Baroness Hartmann, she thought.

Best of all, he no longer knew her himself. He had not recognized her at all as yet and she had only just recognized him. It must all have been ages ago. Such people, of course, had had many different names at various times in their lives.

"One thing is sure," thought the General's wife, "I can drive them both into the pen. You're made, Ina, my child!"

She walked lightly over to the General. He was staring fixedly at the President stretched out on the couch. There he was lying prostrate and for the moment was victor no more. He had clutched his heart and was laboring for breath. He looked like a corpse.

"It will pass off," said the General, "attacks like this always pass off again."

The General needed to encourage himself. The pressure on his liver and stomach had become much more acute in the last few days and an attack of gall stones was imminent. So he was not eating any more. His skin had turned yellow and he was beginning to think less well of life.

His wife took his arm. Her heart was brimming over with joy at her success. "For God's sake, don't stand there daydreaming," she said. They drew him away from the dangerous neighborhood of the President. Then she induced the Professor, who had not quite recovered his composure again, to take the Princess away.

"I'll take care of the patient," she said. For the General's wife was banking on being alone with the President while he was weak and was not entirely master of his own mind or tongue.

She beckoned to Valentine with her eye. "You see I can't entertain the Baroness Hartmann," she said, "please excuse me to her."

"All right, mother," he said.

She hesitated a moment. "I forgot all about

the necklace," she said, "I think she took it. You know the price but let her name it, we're not tradesmen."

"Done," he said, gazing around the room the same vacant way she did. As their eyes met, they both smiled slyly for a moment. The General's wife shrugged her shoulders.

Valentine started to go in to the Baroness but stopped with the portières half parted. What he saw was a strange sight. Felicie was raging around the little boudoir like a wild thing. She had already brushed a number of things off the table and had even overturned a chair. She needed more room. The narrow boudoir could not contain the passionate energy of her movements. More than once her hand reached for her throat as though to tear it open. Her whole appearance showed portentous changes. She looked years older. Yes, serenity and peace of mind were essential to Felicie if she was to remain young. Excitement laid a tragic mask of decay over her features.

The heart of the young man watching her beat faster. He was embarrassed and let the portières close. Behind them he called her several times by name, "Felicie," the name

he had used in their happy days. When he entered she was sitting on the little canary yellow lounge looking at him without seeing him, for there were tears in her eyes.

Her big eyes were full of tears, though they did not brim over but were held back as if by an effort of will. With the same restraint, she said that she was troubled about him.

He could guess what was troubling her, he said.

No, he couldn't, she said, for he did not know the President. He looked behind him where the President was lying. They had better speak softly.

She began again. "Why did you never say a word to me about the Princess?" she asked.

It was unpardonable, he knew it. But he immediately gave up all the brilliant excuses he had in mind. The expression on her face was too strange. Now he saw clearly that all this was the result of his first reluctance in speaking. Because the Princess had not been mentioned between them the first time, he had not been able to bring himself to speak of her later.

"What could I have told you, Felicie?"

he asked. "You would have come to the wrong conclusion anyhow."

"In the end, I should have been right, though," she said. "You are in love with the Princess."

"No, I don't think so," he said, "but please be kind to her."

She stared at the floor in front of her, and her lips pursed tighter. Valentine ventured to speak again.

"She's a dear good little creature," he said. Then she burst forth.

"You have no right to the Princess," she whispered hoarsely, "you've no right to anybody, for everything you do is rank deception." She spoke in the hard tone of a man demanding his money back. Valentine's body went hot and cold from the horror of his position. He had to admit that she had made great sacrifices for them and at heart he really had deceived her. Felicie, wounded, affected him so powerfully that she strangled his objections before he could make them. He could merely wave his hands deprecatingly.

She saw it and clasped her head in her hands. "I didn't mean to . . ." she began, for

had she not sworn to herself in the presence of the General's wife never to show her jealousy, sworn to herself that she would never let it escape her no matter how hard pressed she might be?

"Surely I've learned never to show anything," she thought. "What's the matter with me now?" She was afraid of what she might do next. Her attack was a warning.

She made an effort to control herself, transforming herself back into the proud woman of the world. "Regardless of everything else," she said, "I think the Princess is attractive."

"Isn't she?" said Valentine faintly.

"Of course, she developed earlier physically than mentally, but then so did I," she added, growing silent and noting how true it was, and how little more simple the Princess was than she herself had once been in her native village. Like a younger sister, she thought. She smiled across at Valentine, a smile that made him also a man of the world at once.

He kissed her lovely fingers respectfully. "A thousand thanks, Felicie," he said, "and don't be afraid of the President."

"Well, no more now," she said, "what I

have to say to him will be sufficient." She spoke the words so precisely that he looked uneasily at her.

"My mo . . . the General's wife, rather, is with him now," he said, "she asked me to say goodbye to you for her, Felicie." He did not say anything about the necklace. After the scene they had just had it seemed impossible to go back to that. He went with her through the bedroom. Something was lying on the threshold. What slid out of the leathern case as he picked it up? It was the necklace. Felicie must have knocked it over there during her passion.

"Here it is," he said. His voice sounded ambiguous and he made no move to hand her the thing.

She hesitated herself but presently she asked, "What does it cost?"

He came near bursting out laughing. "After the scene they had just had," he had thought, and directly she was trying to make it up to him with money again.

"If she were really my mother," thought Valentine, "she'd merely say, 'There isn't going to be any more money. . . .' But in that case, of course, she wouldn't get into this

house so soon again. Relations would be strained . . . even with me eventually," he confessed.

So it was; she had drawn him to her and had sought to convince him of her maternity with money. She had better have left the money out altogether. Now there was nothing left for her to do but to pay . . . for a motherhood which money could never authenticate anyway.

He felt sorry for her. Silently he handed her the open jewel case. She closed it without looking at the necklace. Her fingers seemed to burn from the touch for she remembered Kappus' assertion, "In families like this paste jewels have been sold for genuine." She did not want to see or to know the truth. She named the price she would pay. Valentine bowed. Departure.

She crossed the bedroom and went down the hall to the vestibule without a word. Valentine looked around vacantly at her departure in the same way the General's wife had when they were talking business.

But she, who was now crossing the threshold turned around suddenly before the still open door. She felt it all, felt that at that moment

she was as much scorned as scorning. Hate threatened to burst from her. Unknown pain threatened her, and a heart driven hither and yon by jealousy, humiliation and unfulfilled yearning.

The door closed but she still saw his distracted glance through the wood.

"You'll never see me again," she shouted through the panels.

It was the first time she had ever used the familiar "du" with him.

Chapter Four

SHE was beside herself. At first she could not grasp what had happened. It must all be some mistake, some voluntary deception. But strange as the facts were, they were simple enough at any rate. She had found her child again and it really was her child. That she should be helping him and the family in which he had grown up was proof enough for her. The facts were unquestionable, for who could ever imagine spending so much hard-earned money if this were not true. But now it was her right to do it, and her duty.

It was a year ago since she had first begun to think about her child, one short year ago. It had been summer. She was at a coast resort where she used to go. And she was not alone; there had been suitors, of course, as usual. In spite of them, she felt coming over her a positive feeling that she was missing something, that she was losing some essential part of life which by wiser management she need not have lost.

After that the suitors had seemed irrelevant to her. She wanted some more fruitful relationship. She felt a time approaching when one no longer desires to meet new personalities. It becomes hard to tie ourselves down to anyone when we see every being in a totally different way from that we have been used to, when we see each as a world in himself. Previously each one had been a game for her senses. The seriousness of advancing age takes all that away from you, she thought. If only her son were there!

She saw him take form in her mind's eye. Anyone of the hotel guests was likely to turn into her son, full grown, well-dressed and nicely mannered. He would take the porch chair beside her and in a voice full of an unknown warmth, say "Mother."

Unaccustomed to daydreaming, she had no difficulty in repressing these fancies at first. They corresponded too little to reality. Where was her son, or was he even alive? She observed that in the past she had always thought of him as dead, for she had needed complete independence to live her perfectly calculated existence. Her adventures added in with everything else, and in the end she had learned

to turn to account the very things which had cost her most dear. Even her trial, that old trial, serious error though it might have been, had merely furthered her ends. It had given her a kind of notoriety and the notoriety convinced many people that what they had at first taken for guilt was really innocence.

Motherhood alone she had been unable to allow herself for long. It was one adventure that the world had sternly denied her. From an early age, the world, by terrific blow after blow, had taught her the realities of life and she obeyed it blindly.

She forgot her child but since last summer it was as though alive in her again. She was able to deny it at first, but was never entirely able to again. And why should she? She was rich and could afford to have it now. The world was in league with her now and would even allow her to have her son as soon as life seemed more promising with him.

Of course this was not settled in a moment. Back from her summer's sojourn, she let things take their course. She was not in the habit of making bargains which promised her more loss than gain.

The first serious danger of mistaking her

child for another she met with extreme caution. She had never known the name of the people in that house on Berliner Street before which a fountain had once stood, and into which a man had once gone with a baby in his arms. But she made sure that this was the same child, that no child but this one had ever been seen in the house and that his age tallied. It was not until then that she would even consider seeing him.

What she saw was an ordinary young man who made even less impression on her at first than she had expected he would. She was prepared for disillusion, but the ideal picture with which she had begun this adventure persisted in spite of her prudence. She missed altogether in him a sense of half-way filial sympathy, something which, had she been less cautious, she might have called instinct. Not once did she feel it in him. From her long experience with men, she found this one neither a very creditable nor a very promising example. He certainly did not flatter her. He would offer her no illusions about himself because he himself had none. He was no conquering hero; at least he had no assurance of any kind. It would not have taken much to

make her leave him where she found him.

He first became really interesting when he became deep in gambling debts to her. She never grew tired of watching how he worked to free himself of them, making use of devices that were far worse than not paying. He struggled senselessly at miserable jobs and for pitiful wages. "And I can buy him free with a word," she thought. "The word 'mother.'" "Utter it," she thought, "he's your son. But no, for then your own struggles will begin. It is not he must be the ravisher here. It is you who must ravish your own son."

For the first time in her life she encountered difficulties which it did not lie in her own power to solve. It was all up to him. He was a pretty dependent young man, long ago given a thoroughly effective drubbing by life. He had not waited until his real mother appeared. And he would hardly receive her with open arms now. In fact his arms would open with some reluctance.

She realized all this immediately. It was the first thing she seriously realized and accepted. She, too, would have to learn distrust. Even the ability to stand alone comes with acute need. He was not like her. He had less

of her hot and morbid nature to overcome before he was quite adjusted to this world. Nevertheless, she understood him inside and out with an understanding born of her own early needs. She felt it in her very vitals. And suddenly she recognized his face, too. She recognized his mouth and his forehead. She found the mole on his scalp.

What a rare time of secret love it had been, unspoken love, as though her child could not understand her yet. Sometimes she felt him beside her as though he were in his cradle. Yet, at the same time, he was this youth who questioned her. She had sympathy for everything he did, for his doubts and his reserve, no matter whether he responded to her from self-interest, or polite weakness, or whether he gave himself whole-heartedly. He let her ravish him. He let her take him captive and be his refuge and yet he reserved for his own all that lay in the past, secrets like those which loomed behind her, too.

She would see him glow with pleasure and she was happy herself. And this happiness, despite its lack of fulfillment, was precious to her. Yet she knew that it could not go much farther and remain unpunished.

And at last it became perfectly impossible not to use money in this business, or so she assured herself. What good was she to her son without money? An importunate beggar woman. She had never forgotten what life is without money. It had been easier for her to forget her child. She knew that without money life is a condition in which every desire becomes dangerous, while one's own nature is made a hell into which the world whips one farther and farther. Money, on the other hand, gives us freedom to judge and fortifies our own self esteem. It is the inner salvation and because of it the world lifts its heavy hand from us.

Cleanliness and freedom are the fruits of money. She was absolutely convinced that love itself was one of its effects. The poor have never yet been long loved. She despised those bourgeois romanticists who poetized about love. All love is venal and all love is paid for. If anyone has even once in his stark need, frankly and undisguisedly sold his body, can it be possible for him not to want to spare his purchase when he himself is once more a buyer? And she had spared Valentine. She

had put no unnecessary humiliation on the General's wife.

Why should she hate them? She had come to them as a friend with all due consideration. How many delicately worded appeals for money had passed between them, all leading to the purchase of that necklace whose genuineness she herself prefered to leave untested. In any case she couldn't work without money. The family's predicament as well as her own made it essential. The real mother must come forward with open hands. Then she would really be his mother, a living proof of her own genuineness. People who had always been poor would simply have accepted her for her own sake.

But here it was otherwise. These people had had money and had known the luxury of fine taste. To be deprived of this luxury was more embittering than to be deprived of their fine linen. The closer one came to this family the more things one understood. It was not only that they felt as something vulgar, even the most delicate intimation that they needed money, but that they loved Valentine, not much it is true, but for what they had done for him. They loved this incarnate self-

deception as if he were their own child. Or rather, this applied only to the General's wife. The General was credulous or nearly so.

All things taken into account, Baroness Hartmann had studied people long enough to be able to understand even these. But suddenly one feverish hour came to her in the midst of her ripe wisdom and experience. Then she felt that there was no further room for doubt and she threw caution to the winds. She had become hardly more than a cry: "My child! I must get back my child! I want him. He's mine and I want him!"

She was off like a whirlwind and did not stop until she was standing under his window. He got into the car with her and she drove him at sixty miles an hour into space.

"I want you to stay with me now," she said sharply, "You are going to stay." She commanded it. She stormed at him. She threatened him. She threatened him with the fake necklace. It was not false, he asserted. Or only partly so, he added much more gently.

Not until he had promised everything she wanted did her own energy crumble and she herself give in. "I know very well that it's not so simple," she said.

They drove under a most beautiful spring sky, far out over the green fields, through a wood that a moment before had been a blue haze on the horizon but now lay moist and quivering around them.

"It's not what it really seems to be so long as we're not in it ourselves," said Valentine. "When I leave my parents, I'll renounce the Berliner Street house for good and come to you. Have you thought of what a sensation it will make, Felicie?"

He felt very clearly that she was weakening and he unfolded his thoughts to her slowly. "You want to go ahead too fast, Felicie," he said. "You have lots of tact, but who can afford to have too much in this affair? You know that you yourself would not dare to come out and tell the General's wife everything to her face. In your heart of hearts you know that one doesn't just up and do things that way. And yet you expect me to do it. Don't deny it, Felicie, you do expect that I'll plant myself in front of the General's wife and order her to confess. Isn't it a little fantastic, though?"

"Of course," she said, "of course, it's fantastic. It's also fantastic for me to come into that

house like a stranger . . . as well as everything else that's happening."

He understood. She meant the money. She meant the Princess, too, but first and foremost she meant the money. At present he preferred to dwell on the second theme.

"The Princess," he began, "if you only understood how little she interferes with you, Felicie. What am I talking about? She really serves your ends. I can play lord and master with her only because you are so kind to me. It is you who give me the courage to try my luck again with a child of man. How can I ever thank you enough if I succeed?" He spoke with the gentlest of smiles. "Don't let me go," he pleaded, "how else can I keep the poor little thing?"

"Don't lie," she said sorrowfully. "You are in love with her. I could learn to bear it if you did not love her under the influence of the General's wife. But she hates me and she is taking you away from me with the help of this girl."

He had many things that he wanted to explain to her but she was already talking about the President. The President was the blackest spot in the whole business. She could not

find a word fit to describe what was taking place. "If only I were the General's wife," she said.

The President had been enticed into the house and let loose on this girl, on their own son's betrothed.

"I'm not afraid of him," Valentine asserted, but he encountered her severe glance.

"You take him for a man like yourself," she said, "but what is he really? A monster."

Valentine took her hand. "Felicie," he said, "I'm willing to do anything you want, but there are times when you talk to me from a different world."

He felt her hand tremble. She grieved him in spite of his ineradicable dislike of her violent emotion.

Suddenly he said, "I'll tell you, Felicie, how things really stand. The Princess is poor," he went on without pausing. "They've told you otherwise but she is really poor. And it is the President, whom they barely tolerate at best, whom they expect to provide a dowry for her. Doesn't it take your breath away? It does mine."

He shrugged his shoulders and gave a very tactful laugh, neither shameless nor naïve, so

that she had no choice but to laugh with him. It's a mistake to come open-handed to them as a friend, she was thinking. You are better liked if, like Seehase, you come with intent to harm while they filch your money from you by tricks and scheming. "Even my own child is in it with them," she thought.

Anger surged over her. "Have I no way of protecting myself?" she thought. "You never once took the trouble to defend me." They had reached the city. She stopped the car. "Get out," she said.

He obeyed the command. His manner seemed to say that he would have obeyed any command she might have given him. But the impression it made on the angry woman was that she was being played with. She slammed the door to in his face.

It was evening when he found himself with her again. At home he had immediately demanded that the President stay away. And he had succeeded in accomplishing nothing, of course.

"What can I do? We are poor people, Felicie," he said. "Haven't you yourself told me that you know what that means? It means that one no longer has a choice of the ways

of existing, not even if one is a lady, and the General's wife is a born lady."

"They aren't born, you know," she said harshly, "your ladies are like the heads on the old gold pieces, a stamp on the metal. It seems to me now that one's own son may be little more than such a head."

"It's up to you," he said, "you don't want it otherwise." With these firm words, the first of the kind that he had ever spoken to her, he found the courage to go on. "You should never have given us money," he said. "You should never have lent me money. You would have had to go about it in quite a different way if you had been poor, Felicie."

She stood bewildered. He could not have said anything more unexpected.

"Poor!" she repeated. "If I had been poor, you would have . . ." She waved her hands. He understood . . . they would have thrown her out.

"But then," he said deprecatingly, "we should not have understood you so quickly. No, we should not have understood you at once, but in some ways it would have been easier to understand you."

"Keep quiet," she said rudely. "You don't

understand anything at all." For here again was that hateful romanticism; even in her own child she was coming across that miserable evasion of the facts of life. It was in this way that they all got their courage to be cruel. . . . At that moment she was nearer than ever before or afterwards to saying that she had made a mistake, that she did not really know him, and he had better go.

But suddenly she said something entirely different. She marvelled herself how different it was from her thoughts. "I want the Princess to come here," she said, "I want her here with me, with you." He went off at that. He was overjoyed that at last they wanted the same thing. He hugged her in his joy.

"Felicie, you are making two creatures happy," he had said. She had answered him with her first smile of pain.

"You don't guess how happy yet," she said. "I'm going to let you dine alone together. I'm going to the theatre and you can have the whole house to yourselves."

The next day she gave all her orders and superintended the cuisine and the table. But when they came she was gone.

She sat in a loge at the theatre without seeing what was going on on the stage. By now the Princess was being settled in her white chair by old Tietge, with tenderness probably, while Franz did the same for Valentine. From then on they would be sitting there fulfilled by a sense of their own worth to one another. Both would be sitting very erect and looking incomprehensibly youthful. Yes, that was it, their faces were absolutely without background, even Valentine's. She saw that in company with the Princess he wore another face, not that face stunned by experience, by disillusion, guilt and hatred. There were no corpses between him and the Princess.

"I make him feel older," she thought. "I can't really give him courage. My money poisons everything that I want to make out of him. However much I may have struggled, youth loves without a struggle. He needs the Princess."

She felt her heart contract. But it was the truth as far as he was concerned. And it was much stronger than the truth she represented and over which he so carelessly strode.

"I'm jealous," she thought, "jealous of him and of her. Aren't they poor, and still they're

in love. His beloved Princess is not only poor, she's stupid into the bargain. What does she really know about him? What binds her to him?"

Certainly not the deepest tie in life. Not the fact that he had suffered through her guilt, was indeed what he was as a result of her guilt.

After an instant of inner silence, her hard and heavy pride reared itself up with a hiss. "I'm responsible for a human soul," she thought. "My greatest right to him is that I have done him so much wrong. No one can deprive me of my guilt and I cannot ransom it with money." She repeated the words poignantly, " I cannot ransom it with money."

What she could not be sure of in life eluded her in thought. "If I had come to him poor, I should always have been guilty of everything. Even if I were dead, I should still find my guilt waiting for me in the Beyond, together with my love. For I love him. I love my child. But it is hard when once you grasp it all completely. Help! Who is there to help me?"

She did not yet think: God! Unaccustomed to such humiliation as had overtaken her, she felt that she was no longer the person that she had been. She had become another person,

more remote, smaller, the girl who had set her heavy jug before the doors of the mountain church, who had entered and bent her her knees. Thunder had pealed . . . the organ. From the chancel rose an angel. It was the young priest, once an angel to her. He seemed so again. His youthful face!

Baroness Hartmann recalled herself from her reverie by an effort. She felt ill. She thought she was losing consciousness until she perceived that, on the contrary, she was recovering it again. Instead of the organ, garish revue music was screeching. On the stage fifty shrill voices, filled with all the pertness in the world, sang to the music. These were bodies and no mistake, essentially bodies. They were costly, they were rich, the lights flashed from them in more and more delicate and varied patterns. The whole house recognized its best self on the stage, though practically no one there would ever have money enough to be so lovely, to revel thus in the glow of life.

The fifty female bodies wore golden jackets, sparkling up to their chins. From the waist down they were prominently nude. One hundred long and slender legs in golden slippers moved to one rhythm through the glittering

world on the stage. At the finale, they formed a semi-circle around their three leaders.

Of these the woman's legs were the loveliest of the lot, while one of the men was a well-formed young dancer, with a flat stomach and shoulders like a Hercules. A second male dancer, an old man of middle age, was the victim. All the fifty-two straight young bodies had undisguised designs on him. He was called the "Old Boy" and they sang that it was true he'd soon be dead, but "when he died there'd be something to divide." Which the "Old Boy" sang along with the others.

The lovely legs and the well-formed youth in the meantime came down stage amidst one light. The spotlight illuminated them before the curtain.

Baroness Hartmann entered her house. The gramophone was playing. She did not let them see her, instead she watched them from one of the front rooms, these two children who were dancing. They were probably doing no worse than the heirs of the "Old Boy." And the music was the same. Heard at close quarters, and diminished by the small machine, the childish music seemed to pour out in a harm-

less, hearty march of which a more lavish volume of sound would have made who knows what.

Both the young people placed their feet with the nicest precision while at regular intervals their whole bodies quivered as though electrified. Or they would remain at arm's length, their hands stretched out with fingers intertwined, their faces earnest. The two young people were as serious and exact alone there with one another as if they were dancing before a packed hall for the world's championship. They would have paid no attention to the solitary onlooker even had they been aware of her.

Her mind took it all in, the little sweet-lavender skirt, the proud frock-coat, took in the long legs, the bobbed hair, the faces without backgrounds, and their glow, that somewhat too garish glow of youth, as though cast by a hidden spotlight.

She thought, "I must not disturb them," and again, "what a pity for her." She turned away. Then she saw the pair of them dancing, reflected in the front room mirror. But she also saw herself, her face weary from this night, from all she had lived through that day.

She felt chilled at that reflection. "What is happening to me?" she thought. "That is an old woman in the mirror."

Although her beauty still hung on the rare incalculable point of ripeness, she felt that it was undermined. She was simply observing what had not yet appeared on the surface. Her forehead was still smooth, her skin without a blemish and, when she wished it, her large eyes could grow calm. Only, thought kept lurking behind them.

"It's so long since I have been through anything real that the façade has lasted far beyond its time," she thought, "but it is taking its revenge now." She shuddered. She did not soon forget that shudder. She was on guard against assaults. Let Valentine come, the next day he would find a resolutely kind friend but one who would not permit herself to be imposed on any further. He and the rest of them in the Berliner Street house would have to meet their obligations.

Baroness Hartmann expressed surprise that her visit had never been repaid. They sent their respects, at least Valentine said that they came from the General's wife. Once the General had even permitted himself to accom-

pany his son, whereupon she refused to see either of them.

It was high time that a new tack was taken if negotiations were to be revived. And this actually happened. They demanded a large sum of money from her. Afterwards they would pay the desired return visit. Valentine told her about it, at the same time expressing his complete disapproval of the mission unfortunately confided to him. The money was not wanted for him, still less for the General's wife. It was wanted for the sole and only purpose of creating a presentable dowry for the Princess and would no doubt be paid back from the proceeds of the government compensation. The Duke, her father, could not possibly refuse to recognize his daughter's debts, especially when such a person as General Vogel von Lambart appeared as the creditor. Presented in this light, it might result in the Princess' coming into her full rights, in which case she would be rich.

"Then may she be rich and live happily ever after. That's all nonsense and nobody believes it," said the Baroness sharply. He continued to maintain that the General's wife was honest . . . more or less so, he admitted.

"Think, Felicie," he said, "how she has had to get used to existing on hopes, or on illusion, as we say. She doesn't mean to wrong you in any way."

"No?" she answered. "Why should she want to harm me? But if a day were to come when I had given away my last mark, would she take as much pains to repair the wrong as she is now taking to bring it about? No, no, my dear, let everyone pay for his own illusions."

Her businesslike tone of voice stopped any further replies. Hitherto he had told her everything with a sort of fawning, artificial lightness. Suddenly he grew serious.

"I'm glad, Felicie," he said. "Do you want to know why? It was in the cards for us to try to make a shrewd bargain with you. Where on earth does anyone do differently? But I don't want to see you in that position. I don't want to doubt you," he said, closing his eyes.

Her heart beat high. He did love her, he wanted to believe in his mother. His real mother was not the woman who bought him. The money which she had spent on him was simply the constant proof to him that she

could not be his real mother. It falsified his position and hers. He felt redeemed when she said, no. She felt redeemed herself.

So unreservedly did he take Felicie's part, that he betrayed a little of his real opinion of the General's wife. On her part, she trusted him enough at last to be able to tell him what she thought about the whole question of the Princess.

"My son," she said slowly, "how does it happen that you are going to marry the Princess? Are you looking for a doll's house? I saw you dancing together the other night like a couple of machines. Of course, she's nice and innocent, but I'm always conscious of the machine in her in spite of her baby blue eyes. There are plenty more like her, although not all are princesses. They're always having to depend on something outside of them to keep them on their feet."

As he seemed to be listening attentively, she went on with growing conviction, "Look at me! I had no money to start with. In order to make money I had to learn everything that there is to learn. But I was always made of flesh and blood." Here she moved her body to show how her heart, her blood, had always

been full of life, but the gesture lacked tenderness and restraint.

"I would a thousand times rather . . ." she began while she thrust the outspread fingers of both her hands through the air and then against her breast. He understood her all right. She meant, "a thousand times rather you married a woman like me, a poor working woman, a woman without scruples or recognized conventions, if you must . . . only not the Princess."

He sat stooped over, his head bent. His head was drawn irresistibly towards her hands. Then she reached for him. "My son," she said, as to her own flesh and blood. Again she said, "My son," but this time through his hair. Her lips rested among it and her harsh voice softened and was smothered in his hair.

Valentine swallowed hard. A surge of emotion swept over him and he gave himself up to it. He welcomed the storm. In life the inner tumult was always being suppressed, but he would let himself be intoxicated by it. She was his mother! She was as certainly his mother as he was he. His mother was the questionable adventuress before whom the world drew back. She was the unfortunate woman

alone on her self-made path of evil. He was like her; his fate, too, was extraordinary and she made him conscious of himself again. She brought him strength with which to confront life. And it was by means of this that he recognized her. . . . with an excess of happiness, because he never, never again could doubt her. He choked and tears started from his eyes, falling on her hands.

"Forgive me, forgive me," he said, "for being so slow, for holding back from you. I should long ago have gone down like this to my mother." He knelt, his head against her knees.

"I have your life in me," he stammered. "I am unspeakably proud of it. I will become worthy of you, I will be a man for your sake yet. If only we were in some danger, I would show you. I'll give up everything for you. Only take me."

"Child, my child," she said. She tried to lift up his face but he held it close against her knees as though in a refuge. Then she bent down near him so that they were both kneeling in front of one another.

"At last," she said. "It was harder than anything in the past."

He did not hear her but went on saying to her, "I'll give up everything, even the Princess."

"I accept," she said in a deep voice. She kissed him and arose.

He followed her. "Give me a room for tonight," he said, "I won't go back to them."

She turned to him. "On the contrary," she said, "you'll sleep in their house tonight and tomorrow you will tell them to their faces of your decision—of our decision." By the tone in which she said these words he understood her.

She did not mean to avenge herself but her triumph must be an unequivocal one, an unconditional rupture with his family, all their hopes of exploiting her defeated. At grips with her foe, the General's wife, she would give no quarter. No one need expect mercy from her, not even a harmless child. The poor Princess' lover was sad and anxious. What was to become of her? "Of us," whispered a troubled voice inside him, which he bade be still.

He left her and she thought it was all settled. Valentine had promised to be back again by tomorrow noon to take possession of

his room. In spite of the late hour, she gave orders for arranging the house. She was so happy that she did not want to sleep. She did not want to renounce her joy in order to sleep. This was the moment of his surrender. Whatever else happened she would always have that moment.

But it had cost her an effort; she was tired. "I will dream of him," she thought.

And she really did dream of him. . . . it took place in court. He was in the jury on the highest tier of benches. She knew he was there without seeing him. She thought that she herself was standing below in front of the judge. They were examining the crime of the man in the defendant's chair, her former lover who had wanted to abandon her. She was thinking, "What business is it of the law's? Everyone fears him or loves him, no one can resist him. He feels nothing but contempt for all of them. I alone am the mate for him, the gambler's mate. We gamble, we travel, we gamble and are constantly in danger. . . . I who was already free of life's worst adventures and on the high road to respectability. But I found him, I loved him and that's my affair. No matter if he did

steal from me and leave me. He is still the only soul since my darkest youth for whom I could forget myself. It's my affair and mine alone, gentlemen."

Then the court summoned the witnesses. A witness produced a closed jewel case. He had no collar on his shirt and seemed to have no eyes. His fleshy grayish-white forehead with its deep wrinkles, mobile like an animal's, bespoke rage and cruelty. He laid down the jewel case, he stretched out his filthy talons to secure his loan. He was her handsome lover's accomplice, and had caught him . . . preparing to flee. He had brought back her jewels to the woman who was about to be deserted.

In her dream she tried to scream. For the first time she began to understand that this was her old trial. She herself, she herself had denounced her former lover. And then the most terrible thing of all happened; her son was watching her. For he was present though she could not see him.

"My son," she cried. "I didn't mean to, believe me. I didn't want to harm him. It was his desertion that drove me frantic, not

his taking the jewels. I loved him too dearly for that. I would gladly have given everything to him. What did I care about the miserable jewels that were false anyhow? Yes, false. It was he who was deceived in the end. He did not really want to leave me. Don't you leave me, my child!"

For suddenly it was clear to her that Valentine himself was her former lover. Their features were the same. And he would have gone down on his knees before her, too, but the gendarme held him fast. She wanted to rush over to him, but was rooted to the spot in mortal dread while the judge's voice rendered the decision. "Detain her and let him go!"

The judge said, "What does she want of him? He's not her companion, there's her companion." He pointed to the witness without a collar. "There's the face of a born betrayer, there's the natural accomplice of a woman who would hale her lover before the law. Take him," the judge said, "together you'll go far." With those words, the judge, without himself moving, moved them towards one another. The horrible creature was reach-

ing out his claws for her. The wads of flesh on his forehead wrinkled, his eyes were stony hard.

Driven by mortal dread of that glance, she blenched back, she sought to find one face to rescue her. Her lover covered his face with his hands. Then on the topmost bench she discovered the best face of all, an angel from heaven, the young priest of her childhood, who had saved her from desperation once before in their village. He was as beautiful as first love. Then she saw that he was her own son.

"Valentine!" she cried. At the time she did not wonder that her own son was the same as the young priest and her lover.

The young priest called down from above, "Mary! Mary!" he called, as at the time when she had loved him. He was the only one who had ever called her that. He reached out his arms to her and she lifted hers to him, but there were so many between them. And there were always more of them, listeners, attendants, judges, all in league to separate her from her child, while the horrible witness was almost digging his talons into her throat. As

though paralyzed, she could only wait for what would happen. . . .

Then she awoke.

Early in the morning she called up Valentine. She was weary with waiting, she said, fearing that he would not come. In his stead the President suddenly appeared.

He was looking exceptionally well-groomed and made use of all the courtesies of a by-gone time of life. He remained standing a few steps away from her after she was seated, and did not interrupt her. He was admiring what she had on and the way she spoke. It was only after she had explicitly asked what he wanted that he produced a letter. She had been so slow in asking because she feared his face, as she feared nothing else in the world. She immediately recognized Valentine's writing on the envelope and the Princess' name.

"Seehase," she said in alarm, "you stole this letter."

He did not drop his suave tone. "I've got into the habit, perhaps to the detriment of

my health, of paying my morning visit to the Princess," he said.

"To the detriment of your health!" she said. "Last time it was a fainting fit."

"The General's wife encourages me because I bring her little favors," he said. He smiled indulgently. "And what do you think, Baroness, while I was there this morning, the Princess got her breakfast on a silver tray with all the customary bows from the servants! They have servants again," he added off-hand.

"What did I tell you, you stole it," and she drew out the letter and read it. Valentine wrote the Princess that it was becoming more and more necessary for him to leave the house which held all that he most loved on earth. She read the "most loved" over twice. He ended by saying, "I'll explain everything later and then we will be happy."

She tore the letter to pieces. "It's of no importance," she said.

"Just as you like," said the President politely. He took a deep breath and added with the greatest respect, "I confess my weakness, but I have a special interest in the Princess. You, Baroness, are no less interested

in the young man, I take it. We have already done so much for the young people that it is no wonder if each of us joins in protecting them against the woman who is trying to betray them both."

"Trying to bet . . . ," she began. She rose from her chair. During the entire conversation her last night's nightmare seemed to be prolonging itself.

He rose the instant she did and shrank back from her.

She stood before him menacingly. "Judgment must be rendered," she said. "Once long ago I learned to know you as a traitor. Do you still remember?" she asked.

He was silent; only the scowl on his forehead grew deeper.

"Do you still remember, Seehase?" she demanded and then, with emphasis, "God has sent you here. This very day I'll have it out with you. Years ago you robbed me of my happiness and brought me to accuse the one man I really loved in order to get my money from me. I hated him, but because he deceived me, not because he stole the jewels. Do you understand that? Not because he stole the jewels!"

He saw how she was working herself up and pitied her.

"Be it as you say," he said, "for my part, it was very long ago and I had forgotten all about it. I had even forgotten your face, Baroness, though beauty ought to be unforgettable." He waved his hand deprecatingly. She rose to her full height.

"I could never forget you in a hundred years," she said, "I recognized you at the General's." She pronounced it like a doom.

"I recognized you, too, Baroness," he whispered, "I may even confess that my fainting was not on the Princess' account."

"I know you now, Seehase," she said. "Do you understand what that means? You aren't standing there now as the President. Your latest disguise is falling off you in rags. You have no collar on."

He was struck, as though by a blow; he felt shriveled and wanted to sink through the floor. Not until she thought he was vanquished and was on the point of leaving him for a fresher atmosphere, did he recover himself.

"You are mistaken," he ventured to say, "I have an English tailor working for me who does his principal business in France. Cor-

rectness tempered by grace, that's his style, as you can see for yourself. We, my dear friend, must affect the same style."

"Are you gracious and correct?" she asked.

"It is rather you who are, Baroness," he answered, "but have you forgotten that our careers have bred similarities?"

She did not want to hear. "I knew you when you were different from what you are now, Seehase," she persisted.

"Different?" he said in the pause that followed. "And I suppose you are the only one who has remained the same? I suppose you are really not the Baroness now. No, you must excuse me, but you certainly are. And may I ask why I should remain what I was twenty years ago, now that I am President? What has been has been and it would be plain and simple going if there were nothing more than a man without a collar at the bottom of the long climb. But there's a good deal more besides. I won't go so far as to say that such things are ever done with, but they're disposed of. In fact there'd be no sense in bringing them up at all if it were not for the pleasure of talking with you, Baroness."

The President was master of himself again.

He was relying, as she saw very clearly, on the great regard, which, uninfluenced by smaller things, he felt for her person, and also on his own untrammeled thoughts.

He took away her courage to open an attack. She remained speechless as he continued. "These vivid recollections are not a good sign," he began cautiously. "May I warn you as an old acquaintance? I understand, of course, but you are too much worked up about the young people's note. I feel a little hot under the collar myself. We are being led along, Baroness, not to use a stronger term. We're not the swindlers here, it's others who are swindling us."

She attempted to ward him off. "Please speak for yourself alone," she said, but she no longer had the upper hand.

"We're in the same fix, Baroness," he said decisively, "they are living on your money. They let you take their son home as if he were your own."

"He is my son!" she cried, her eyes aflame. But an instant later she was sorry she had spoken. It was futile, for Seehase smiled amused. "I understand," he said, "the Princess

is my child, too. Let us not try to fool one another."

"Be still," she cried, "you know nothing at all about innocence."

"And you, of course?" he said, marching up to her. She wrung her hands with their rings.

"I love purely," she said.

"And I not vilely," he asserted, "if for no other reason, because this will be the last time. When I'm done with it all, perhaps there will be some halo around my memory, too, for the Princess will be rich when I am gone. At present, however, it is written that she, as well as the young man in the case, shall suffer from lack of funds. Otherwise our designs would go to wreck, yours as well as mine."

He spoke in a businesslike manner. But it was the tone in which it ought to have been said in any case. She felt humiliated by his words and against them she was defenseless. Had she not refused to give the money for the Princess? He had merely described what she was doing, stripped of all trappings.

"I don't want to know about it," she murmured, dropping into her chair.

He stood in front of her, over her. She was muttering, "I, his own mother." Whom was her whisper accusing? She sensed the form standing above her. Its voice came from it unsoftened. "Women in love lose their heads," it said, "even you. Don't give that boy another cent."

It was a command, but it did not proceed from the figure above her but from her own heart. Above her the tempter still tried her and she was near to succumbing. "And suppose I were not his mother after all?" she thought. Her doubt stopped abruptly, she felt herself on the verge of the abyss. Away from the abyss! Better that face above her than that. She looked up.

She saw a business-man waiting to close his deal, not a devil. A man who had learned to consider the rights of others, and even to concede a point in some cases. What had become of her old freedom of action? This man knew what he was about. A kind of passion governed his cruelty. Both felt united by the virus in him. His manner assured her that they understood one another like old comrades and should not oppose each other.

Besides he was bound to her through that

judge's sentence in her dream. She would never be quit of him, for their past was not to be buried. She knew it now.

Her breath forsook her. Then she heard, as she had heard it in her dream, a voice calling, "Mary."

The young priest was calling her again, though now he was her son and was calling his mother. "Mother Mary," he was calling.

She rose. Her face, on which her antagonist had traced so many phases of a battle lost, was firm now and calm in triumph. Words were unnecessary, he merely looked at her and knew that he had lost. He bowed and went.

She wrote to Valentine: "My son, you must not take a room in my house. Your beloved will receive the money she needs from me, for I am your mother."

Chapter Five

"THESE vivid recollections are not a good sign," the President had told her. Obviously he was not pleased that she should have recalled him in the rôle of the man without a collar. But she, too, began to feel herself really threatened by her memories. Up till now her past had been utterly separated from her present life, and yet it was lying behind her there, cold and petrified, while she lived on, a breathing being. She perceived too late that it could never be otherwise, the present lay in the full light of day but was bounded on all sides by shadows. A kind of half-darkness arose behind her, from which figures detached themselves. She was no longer alone, the curtain might be rung up on her at any moment. She would be the spectacle, she who was still undaunted.

Unconscious of how she sat in her corner, she was really carrying on a conversation with someone who more than thirty years before had vanished into the abysses of society.

Frightened, she slipped to the door to see if anyone had overheard her. A slow shudder ran over her body, a chill seized her, and she actually had to question who she was, she a woman, a business-woman engaged in international enterprises, moving in good society, sober and capable. What had come over her, why was the woman of the world trembling?

"Ah! I am trembling for my child," she thought. "It was the question of the return of her child that had kindled these thoughts. It was her blood in her son's veins that was nourishing these thoughts. It was her need for her child that was making her weak in the presence of the long-dead past.

For two long days she struggled not to let Valentine come to her again. Then he told her that his parents were planning to return her visit. He said "his parents," as though she had not felt clearly enough that he was far away from her again. She had sent the money. He hung on to the telephone. There was no end to his thanks and flatteries, but he had said "his parents." So that instead of his actual words she seemed to hear others. He was the young priest in her dream. He was one with her son, in fact, was her son. As in her dream,

he called with her son's voice, "Mother Mary."

She had asked the whole family to come that same afternoon. At first she looked forward with distress to the hour of their arrival. To think that she should have to show herself after all that she had just been through, to let the sharp-eyed General's wife see the traces! She used every device to compose her face, but it was no longer one of self-confidence, of poise. That could not be restored, her unquiet thoughts kept stamping her troubled features with more tired and more tender lines. Those eyes had lived through more than could ever be avowed. They were defensive, but full of a fugitive charm, reflected even in the mirror.

"I'm growing thinner," she thought. What a shock. "My face is thinner already, my figure, too. What's to stop me now from competing with the Princess!"

So she thought as she drew on her dress. It left much of her body uncovered and she hoped that it might attract attention from some of the bare places in her spirit. Then she hastened eagerly to meet her guests.

The first words the General's wife said were, "You're looking younger, Baroness."

The young Princess kissed her hand. Baroness Hartmann hugged her and asked her softly, "When is the marriage to be?" The Princess simply answered with her lovely look. The General's wife, oddly enough, acted as though she had not overheard, while embarrassment was unmistakably written on young Valentine's forehead. What did that mean? she wondered.

The General, meanwhile, took the Professor's arm. "You ought to know, Baroness," he said, "that in spite of the Duke's wishes, the Professor is anxious to have a simple marriage. He's considering a wedding outside Berlin . . . during the summer, at some shore resort, perhaps."

"Ah," she said and looked at the Professor whose schemes, attributed to him in this way, filled him with some astonishment. The General's wife moved to one side and began to appraise the furnishings through her lorgnette. Her husband had carried out her instructions.

She was not entirely without a sense of un-

easiness, for the large sum, which the Baroness Hartmann had given them, and which was to have been placed to the Princess' account, had fallen into the hands of creditors and only a little had been rescued. What was to be done? Demand a similar amount again? At that point the General's wife had hit upon the plan of taking a villa at Heringsdorff. It was natural that the Baroness Hartmann should stay with them as a guest of the family until the marriage of the young people and that, in this way, she could be made to pay for the house. After the wedding it could simply be sold again.

The General's wife did not confide in her husband prematurely, he might have found it hard to understand her. Even Valentine, to whom she had had to say a word or two, grew thoughtful about the transaction. Whenever the General's wife looked at him or at her husband she was more than ever proud of her Schollendorff tradition. The difference between her affairs and those of the older Schollendorff was a question of time, she decided. The exigencies of her own days were pressing upon her, Ina Schollendorff. She faced them with a shrug of her shoulders,

troubled only, it was evident, by the fear that at heart she was too well-bred for the competition she was forced into.

The others were conversing in lively tones. Baroness Hartmann's voice rang out more high-pitched than usual. For a moment she stood shoulder to shoulder with the young Princess directly under the painting of her own youth. She eagerly challenged the double comparison which was all in her favor, as the gentlemen perceived. Even Valentine, the General's wife observed, did not yet know what to make out of it. It certainly was not easy to deal with this woman. She remained dangerous even though she paid. . . . It suddenly occurred to the General's wife that this was a question of dexterity. "I mustn't give her time to move against me," she thought, "or I'll be lost. It has gone too far. She must fall first."

The hostess detached herself from the laughing group. She accompanied the tea-wagon which old Tietge wheeled up to the General's wife. "My dear friend," said the Baroness, "my dear kind friend, pardon our poor service today, but we won't sit down to table for the young people want to dance."

The General's wife was holding two little gold boxes in her hand. They were identical, except that on one of the little rubies with which they were decorated was an F, on the other an L. The expression on the face of the General's wife was too inquisitive to be evaded. Baroness Hartmann had to explain. "The initials stand for the names of two friends," she said, "they divide my name between them. One is called Feli and the other Lissy."

"And what is your name?" asked the General's wife.

"Mary," she said before she had time to think. Then she became aware that her blush was tell-tale to the General's wife. She ended coldly and sharply. "But that's a name for my own use." With that she turned away.

Then she saw the red glow flash from the crystal table over which Valentine and the Princess were bending side by side. The ruby! Valentine had touched the spring, he knew the trick. The General and the Professor had already come up to see it and, on the other side, the General's wife was bathing her long pale nose in the glow from the stone.

Valentine was giving them an account of

its purchase and history. He was using her own words. "Leutenberg wanted it for a talisman but the new owner is more sensible. . . ." At that point Valentine sought her eyes for he had to beg off for betraying her. She stood there desolate, betrayed.

"She was only able to get it because she's a Catholic," Valentine repeated that, too.

Then she recovered her presence of mind and started the phonograph. The young people joined hands immediately. Arms outstretched, they danced seriously and precisely. Her expression was fixed, like something inorganic, he looked serene. It was impossible for them to wish for more than this. The others gathered around them. Baroness Hartmann had a chance to hide her ruby again unobserved.

As soon as she sat down, the General came over to her. He began at once to tell her agreeable things about the house and her person, even going so far as to say that she spread a "rejuvenating" atmosphere. She replied provocatively that she knew how much he was given to dreaming. He ought to find some young companion for himself. At that he reddened and laid his head on one side. Suddenly he confessed all his disquietude. He was

seeking something, he confessed, and did not know what. He was entering upon old age, entering a new land, where everything was new, his worries, his impressions of his own character, above all his sense of duty.

Baroness Hartmann let her glance wander. She stared straight in front of her. They were both silent. The General's wife kept her eye on them, although she was also watching the children dancing and estimating the value of the dining room.

"The biggest question today is our children," the General said with his head on one side, "we don't know anything about them, not even who they are or what to do for them."

She looked up slowly. "Yes," she said, "I know it."

He took a half step back, either from surprise or in an attempt to reach safety, but he immediately stepped forward again in order to stand more at ease.

"My friend, the Professor, solves the problem in his own fashion," he said shrugging his shoulders, "he has made the Princess his own child although she certainly has never urged him to, in any way. But since he has always been what you call given to dream-

ing, he has kept another little girl for other reasons, for quite surprising reasons." He said something in her ear and they both laughed.

"Did he tell you that himself?" Baroness Hartmann asked.

"Of course not," he said, "but I was recently making an investigation on my own account and I found out what I wasn't looking for."

"Your friend," she said, "is following every move the children make. Does he dance himself?" She went up to the Professor. No, he said, he did not dance. But Valentine, who had overheard him, left the Princess and took the Baroness Hartmann's hand. It was the General's wife who played the phonograph for them.

She was delighted to see that the Baroness Hartmann did not dance as well as the Princess. In a contest before a full hall, she would have fallen down miserably. The General's wife made her judgments as Valentine might. He guided his partner correctly, smoothing out her missteps, so that she did not notice them herself, but he did not in the least give in to the pressure of her hands which was of a tender sort. She strove to make up by abandon what she lacked in art. But Valen-

tine was not to be coaxed in spite of her softness. The General's wife judged him simply "In a pinch, he'll be all for the better dancer," she thought. "The Princess has nothing to worry about."

The only new development was that Baroness Hartman should invite a comparison with the Princess. Much as this promised in the way of further developments, the General's wife decided that the time had come to discuss the Heringsdorff transaction. She laid store by that word, "transaction." She was on a rack till the dance should be over. Instead of its ending, however, the General drew it out by asking the Princess to dance with him. He did this so that Baroness Hartmann might have fewer critical observers. His wife understood his intention. Her business schemes grew just that much more determined.

Valentine ventured to cast a glance over his partner's shoulder in the direction of the General's wife and read virtually all that was in her mind about him and about the whole situation. She pierced Valentine with a look, then the General, then the Professor and then cast a restless glance on Baroness Hartmann.

The General who imagined that she had

not found him out in his peregrinations, the unfortunate schoolmaster who had gone so far as to employ the whip in his strange double life! Bitter experience itself had taught the General's wife that every nature hides its own abyss, that even the most open is dark within. How else could we ever be a match for our opponents? Insight alone makes us feared, it is the weapon of those whom fate has treated unfairly. Even the President, once the terror of the General's wife, was now afraid of her himself.

There was the young Princess. Yesterday she had been a simple child not understanding its own inner world of feelings, which, until now, the General's wife had so proudly supervised. Now in some way, not easy to explain in the language of reason, the Princess' understanding had awakened, the General's wife sensed a spirit of resistance on her part. This creature, who was so seriously and silently going through the motions of the dance as though wound up, could constitute a real danger, for she had depths of her own. The General's wife promised herself to neutralize this girl, to make her harmless. Only those who were dominated by her were safe from

her. In her heart of hearts the General's wife was on guard against them all. She was convinced that in the world as she had finally come to know it, she would always come out worst, even in her dealings with Baroness Hartmann.

When the dance was over, the General's wife asked her opponent to show her the house, speaking in a voice that frightened her hostess and made her hurry. The two women left the others. But they had got no farther than the bedroom before the General's wife stopped her hostess. She began without any preamble. The splendid bedroom, the low bed gleaming with gilt and overflowing with silks, embittered her. This atmosphere of fulfillment seemed to tell her how small and insecure was even that portion for which she was so fiercely struggling.

In the drawing room, Valentine and the Princess were dancing again. They set their feet down with precision, nothing in time or eternity could divide them. The General saw that his friend the Professor, was more deeply immersed in this spectacle than was usual with him.

"You are sad, my friend," the General said to him.

Without taking his glance from the dancers, the other said, "I am amazed at the nothingness of human reason."

"Your own?"

"My own," he replied. "The Princess is dancing. She has never been quite able to understand me although the utmost powers of my mind have been dedicated to finding some way to awaken her to life. Now for sometime past I have been watching her awaken. But I have a strong suspicion that my instructive mind, the splendid powers of my intelligence had nothing whatever to do with it. It was dancing that did it."

The General rose abruptly. He wanted to say, "It was love, not dancing," but he perceived that his friend must have his own reasons for not wanting to see this.

"Man is good only for aberrations of body and mind," the Professor went on, "he is unfit for the triumph of the mind for his love of spiritual gain is too small. He is too much inclined to surrender the little mind he has to every wayward impulse that overtakes him.

And he sleeps too much. He is only half successful as a spiritual being. So he has been since we know of him, and so he will always be. Whoever reckons on his intelligence or his conscience will be quickly undeceived. Poor humanity condemned to carry its load of evils, all of which result from weakness, to the end. Better minds than mine have said this, for I am only an old schoolmaster."

The phonograph played in a melancholy way, which, however, did not trouble either of the dancers. They moved about as confident and as unconcerned as though everything were jolly around them. The General did not think of anything to reply at once. Troubled, he recalled how lightly he had betrayed his friend a moment before, though only to Baroness Hartmann who would not think of it again. "We betray one another without let or stay," he reflected, "my friend has a vice, a kind of ridiculous failing, but even in my friend I can't imagine that vice can reach to any depth of his soul." Aloud the General said, "Professor, you are an extraordinary man, a great teacher and my true friend."

There he stopped. No matter how indefinite it may be, one always expects some kind of

recompense, but the Professor was too burdened with his own feelings to answer. Only philosophy could offer him a refuge.

"I tell you we are creatures without minds," he said, still gazing fixedly at the pair of dancers, "irresponsible creatures. This wretched condition once tormented us. Think of never knowing the consequences of one of our acts, of never being able to foresee what we may be doing the next moment! Our ancestors clamored against life and invited death. They hoped before God, at any rate, to find the means to justify themselves. But we have settled things to our own satisfaction. No urge towards justification troubles us nowadays. The word itself has barely survived.

"Freedom from conscience, that is the meaning of our collective science. It pays off the individual at the cost of the future, of the commonalty, of society and mass will. It is expressive of a form of power in which the responsibility of all parties involved is shattered beyond recognition. To whom is a present day leader no matter how proudly he may affect responsibility, really responsible?"

But the General interrupted at this point. "My dear friend," he said, "is it necessary for

me, a court general, to tell you that you talk in paradoxes? Your leader would only be responsible when his class no longer held power. But 'I assume responsibility' means always and everywhere: 'I have the power.' "

"And not the conscience," said the Professor.

"Conscience is a personal duty. You had it when you made the Princess your own child."

"Heaven help me," said the Professor through his clenched teeth, all his helpless and embittered pain becoming audible.

The General went on, "Our children are weaker than we were. Is that our fault? Of course, we don't need to know it, so it is better not to talk with them. One can learn too much about them. About their love life, for example. I suspect that Valentine does nothing with any woman now but dance."

"What else did he used to do . . . ?" asked the Professor in surprise. The General laid his head on one side. He wanted to say, "Oh, Princesses do, too. . . ." He was amazed that he could even think of such a thing.

After a pause, he said with some hesitation, "It's strange, but I, too, sometimes wonder in

a vague way what responsibility may mean. Oh, it's not that I overestimate myself. A human being who claims to be responsible for how it has lived, well we had better not talk of its end!"

Then he grew silent. Even the phonograph was silent and the dancers stopped. Baroness Hartmann appeared in the doorway.

She was flushed with victory for she had just wrested the Heringsdorff villa from the General's wife. The villa was to be her wedding present to the young couple and the General's wife would once and for all be prevented from making money out of it. The transaction had cost her an effort. Her opponent was worn out and was recuperating in the bedroom.

Baroness Hartmann had concluded bigger deals in her life without feeling so exceptionally triumphant. But her mood had been dejected just a short while before. Feeling the eyes of the General's wife upon her, she had covered her bare arms with ermine. Suddenly she dropped the furs and, rushing up to Valentine, kissed him. He breathed the scent of her feverish skin and took a step backwards,

blushing. He looked from the General and the Professor to the Princess who was standing as still as though paralyzed. He was convinced at that moment that Felicie was incomparably the superior beauty of the two.

At last she grasped what she had to do. She kissed the Princess, too. Everyone wanted to breathe a sigh of relief, but the girl drew hastily back as if she had been bitten rather than kissed. Baroness Hartmann, who had been radiant, now looked injured and hard.

The General's wife, who had returned, wanted to break away at once. The big blue automobile drove up. Looking the owner of the car in the face, she said, "We're planning to buy a car again, too. Our affairs are improving."

"There's a picture of a dancer painted on the window behind you," the General observed on the way home.

"Superstition," said his wife, "there's a madonna over her bed to match it." She shrugged her shoulders. "A madonna with a head too big, and the bed is done in yellow silk with pillows to match."

"She really is religious, though," Valentine declared.

But the General's wife immediately retorted: "A motorist and a Catholic. I've never been able to understand how the two could go together. In the course of our conversation, which was heated in parts, she referred to her salvation." She shrugged her shoulders again.

Valentine: "Well, she may have a soul for all that."

The General's wife: "Affectation! To whom did she ever show her soul before? Anything else but, I should say. Today, for example."

Valentine, challengingly: "To me."

This delighted the General's wife. "Let's simply call her an adventuress," she said.

The General pleaded in vain. "Let her be," he said. His wife kept right on. "Doesn't that picture suit her to a T, showing her up in all her glaring extravagance? Then I noticed how she wanted to dance. No excuses, Valentine. I was right after all, aging beauties are not immune to sensual relapses."

Sobs were heard. Everyone started, for no one had observed that the Princess had been crying for some time. Valentine, bending over her, felt how wet her face and neck were. He comforted her softly, saying, "You're the best

dancer in the world." In this way they reached home.

At the same time, as dusk was falling, Kappus, the banker, appeared at the Baroness Hartmann's. He had to wait a little while, then she entered in black, her face seeming pale and thin to him. "So this is how things stand," he said reproachfully.

She understood and said, "A little while ago I felt very lively; things change so quickly."

Kappus made use of an image. "My dear friend," he said, "I have worn my top hat in fair weather for a long time and it wears well. Shall I now trust to its enduring qualities and hold it under a water spout?"

She recognized herself in the old maltreated hat. She looked about for the electric button but hesitated to turn on the light. Kappus also seemed not to want it. "It's good gossiping in the dark," he said and added, "Baroness, you are giving away too much money, you will ruin yourself." As he saw she was starting up, he went on quickly.

"This is the first time in our business dealings, I might go so far as to say the first time during our friendship, that you have ever

heard me talk this way, Baroness. But who is to tell you if I don't? That is what I'm here for. Otherwise I'd have gone off to my estate today where the birds are singing. Besides, I'm improving it a good deal now." He purposely introduced his estate. She must have time to prepare for the blow.

Finally he said in a muffled voice, "I called earlier in the afternoon, but you were entertaining guests. Were they —?"

"They were," she said sadly.

He asked point blank, "Must you do this?"

"I must do it," she said.

He reflected. "I know life," he said, "and what is now happening to you, Baroness, might have happened to me, too, had I let it. Even I once loved when it was dangerous to love, while at home sat my wife and children. I never told the woman. I never got that far. But she knows it. She knows that I am no fickle friend when my passion has cost me my very existence."

She let him finish completely before she said, "I know. But this time it is different. He is my son."

"What?" Kappus exclaimed, rising and turning on the light. "What did you say?" He

peered into her face. Her radiant but troubled face told him that it was true. Kappus felt that he would have to sit down.

She spoke softly but so distinctly that it seemed as if her inner nature were uttering the words. "I've found him again," she said. "I had lost him for a whole lifetime. What have I given up in that time? How great is my guilt towards him? It could never be made up again even if I were to ruin myself."

"They are lying," cried Kappus, deeply alarmed. He was eager to tell her many, many things, which, taken in connection with her own donations, would show up the family of Vogel von Lambart in a totally different light. Suppose she were to find out that the General's wife speculated with the money that she got from her? Or that their son even now wanted to borrow money on the future payments he would get from her? Kappus had already decided to let him have it at a high rate of interest, with a view to recovering in the long run as much as the Baroness lost. He would write up the profits to her account, he decided at that moment, in case the General failed to meet the payments.

But he said nothing about that, for he saw

that it was a question of her child and Kappus loved his own children. He would gladly have weakened in this case, only a sense of duty towards her kept him firm.

"Baroness," he said, "we live in our children, but first we have to live. Think about that. You have worked for what you have. Money is also a kind of child to us, we have created it, too," he said tenderly.

"I got mine in evil ways," she said.

"I don't understand," he said, puzzled, for his friend seemed to him to wander from the point. "You have never broken a single law, Baroness," he said.

"I wonder if my son thinks so, too," she asked. "He thinks that I enjoyed plenty while he was poor, that I remained aloof while he was fighting for his life. He has known the War, suffering, the world, but he has not yet known his mother."

Kappus sighed.

"What did I do instead of taking care of my son?" she asked, "Everything I've done comes back on me now, Kappus, even the faces come back. I am no longer alone." She had difficulty with her breathing and her eyes were turned as though on the invisible.

"Our whole social group is responsible," he said, repeating the words that always comforted him. "Who are we? Men driven by economic necessity. Personally I have been socially minded from my youth. I have been in the Party for thirty-seven years. They still come and ask me for help. I advise them. I do what I can." He mopped his forehead. He seldom felt so oppressed, except on very bad days on exchange.

"Those are our business sacrifices," he heard her saying, "our lives require a different sort."

"To whom are you saying that?" Kappus asked, glad at least to get away from the business topic. But the Baroness Hartmann misunderstood his way of speaking today. "Yes, to whom?" she asked. And added, rising and turning away, "To one alone."

Kappus thought he was dismissed. But he lingered behind her in the hope that she would give him her hand. He said in a conciliatory voice, "When we are in love, we see everything differently."

She wheeled around abruptly. "Am I in love?" she cried. "Maybe I could hate better, but I am forced to love."

Kappus had not expected so much passion

and he left without kissing her hand. She stood in the middle of the lighted drawing room, but she did not see him go. In fact, she could probably not have seen anyone going or coming.

"Crazy," Kappus was thinking. He struggled against this feeling of disrespect, even though he was outside the door. Still irrationality was culpable in his eyes, and besides, it was not possible in her case!

He went to the bank and up to his private office. It was still, the whole building was silent beyond his office. Kappus, his old top hat on his head, stood in the middle of the room, hardly less immersed in thought than was his friend in her home. Still rapt in thought, he went up to his desk which was bare and clean of papers. He sat down and folded his hands on the top of his desk.

His withered hands were white, but soon they filled with blood. The force that revived them was at work behind the forehead of the old man, behind his heavy sunken eyes. . . . He sat there a long time and when he finally looked up again in the midst of his signs, he was sure that young Valentine would visit him . . . for he had been sent for. He would

agree to everything. Kappus would tear from him again every cent of the money he had spirited away from Baroness Hartmann. In the mirror in front of him, Kappus gazed at the face of a magician under a gray top hat, though he did not recognize it as his own.

Baroness Hartmann was standing in the middle of her brightly lighted drawing-room. The door bell rang and she grew uneasy. Would this day never come to an end?

"A gentleman to see you," old Tietge announced. "He is small but is well-dressed. His name is Wernawe, but we don't know him."

A young man entered. He had on a frock coat, not a whit inferior to the President's. His expression as he entered was cynical, but, as he stood before the lovely woman, it grew appreciative.

"I've come about Valentine," he said in the moderate voice she expected from him. As she was visibly alarmed he soothed her. "Nothing has happened to him," he said, but added with emphasis, "*we're* keeping an eye on him."

"Who are you?" she asked.

"An old friend of Valentine's." Wernawe smiled again cynically and see-sawed back and forth on his toes. He had a close cropped head and his forehead was the tallest thing about all his small tense body. Suddenly she saw who he was.

"It was you who struggled with Valentine's spirit when you were boys together," she said. "You are his boyhood friend." She spoke distrustfully out of jealousy. For answer he nodded and see-sawed faster.

She said, still more distrustfully, "You are a Communist, aren't you?"

"That's as it may be," Wernawe said. "First of all we have to do something about our Valentine. He's going to be kidnapped from here."

"But he isn't here," she said.

"Well, he's coming," he said, "I told him to meet me here."

"That was not necessary, Herr Wernawe," she said, "you are mixing in things which don't concern you in the least."

"I mixing? Valentine and I went our different ways long ago. As far as I'm concerned his dear comrades may do what they like with him. But I owe it to the Cause to

save him, for some day or other he's coming over to us. Everything strong comes to us sooner or later."

"He isn't very strong," she said, on the verge of tears, "Spare him," she begged. "What good can he be to you? I'll warn him." She went quickly to the window and opened it.

Wernawe did not raise his voice any louder than if he were standing beside her. "You can leave the window open," he said, "but come back from it or the picket will see that something queer is going on here."

She came back. "The hostile picket?" she said, "then they are going to kidnap him?"

"Be easy, madam," Wernawe said, "we will watch the others. We have found out what their plans are and we are ready for them."

"What do they want of Valentine?" she asked, beside herself, recalling at that moment the hints that he had let fall. She had heard them as in a dream, in those days of slow re-discovery, when the past, his as well as hers, had been like a background of dark music to heighten their pleasure, but had not yet taken form and nearness, was not yet dangerous.

"They want to settle accounts with him,"

he said. Wernawe's irony was at bottom filled with a powerful earnestness. "There have been stories spread about which even *we,*" and he emphasized the we, "would not tell. Of course, we would not understand settling accounts in so literal a sense. His former comrades want money from him. They have cost him a good deal so far. He can't earn too much for them." At that point, Wernawe unmistakably winked at her.

She grew pale. She heard Valentine's voice again, saying, "They have me in the hollow of their hand and are making the most of it." She had worried about it since. But how much worse it would have been for him if he had still been motherlesss as before! She gave Wernawe her hand. "Tell me what we must do," she said.

"Put something out for them to steal," he said briefly.

"Are they that kind?" she asked.

"They are not that kind," he answered, "but they can be made that way. If they don't take Valentine, and we'll prevent them from doing that, they'll take the money or its equivalent instead. They're not particular which. They're not afraid of consequences either.

They know that Valentine is treated like a son of the house here." He spoke without cynicism and made a slight bow. "But we have some regard for consequences," he added.

"You mean denunciation, scandal?" she asked.

"Not a chance of it," he said. "But between them and us everything will take place privately, as if the police had never been invented, just exactly like a detective story. The main thing is to get hold of them while they're stealing. Let us take care of the rest."

An uncontrollable inner tumult told her on the whole, she would rather give the money without knowing too much about it all. What creatures they were! And what madness! To engage in this would cost her even her bourgeois respectability, the first and hardest concession she had wrung from life. What was there more that her son could demand? Should she go into this adventure with him as she had in those dark days with her lovers? A doubtful tumult was raging in her heart . . . love, only too well known . . . yes, hate too, as always in the struggles with her lovers, and yet it was all incomprehensible as though she had never experienced it before.

Her face no longer wore its expression of impenetrable calm. Wernawe saw clearly that she was preparing to shield herself.

"It will blow over, madam," he said, "and then you'll have him back again. Better make an end to the business once and for all." He comforted her with a kind of gentleness. But in a moment he reverted to his main idea. "If Valentine really gets free, he's our man," he said. "I know him. He's not only energetic, the others are energetic, too. But what good is mere energy when it comes to saving him from weakness? Who can make it effective? But he will act sensibly according to our ideas, the ideas that we alone possess. All the rest is dead mechanism that is fast running down."

Small as he was, Wernawe held his head high. He gazed cheerfully and incisively out of his clear oblique eyes. "Of course, they aren't done with me either," he said. "I was as good as buried, but I still have my head on my shoulders." He was sûre of his business. He had completed the better part of a long wait before Valentine appeared.

They were standing near the door as Valentine suddenly stepped between them. He

spoke in a muffled voice for he had taken a look outside and realized that the business concerned him.

"There's not a minute to lose," he said, "our enemies are planning to return but they won't succeed this time for I'll fight first." His force surprised her. She admired him.

"Just a minute, Wernawe," Valentine said. Bending towards her he told her in a whisper that her sacrifice tonight would be her last. She would never need be ashamed of him again. Never again. "Don't think I've forgotten that I promised to make a man of myself, to be worthy of you," he added, "I knew that you took me for a liar today. Why are you so callous to me?" Then he went on more excitedly, "But that can never happen again for now danger has come. Let them extort money from you? Let them extort my life from you? I'd rather die." She simply stood there silent.

Wernawe had slipped among the hangings beside the window. He returned and whispered in her ear, "What are we willing to pay to get him out of their clutches? One of them is beginning to climb the tree under the window."

She stood silent. As though by accident, she walked up to the crystal table. She toyed with it as though it were nothing in particular. At first Wernawe saw only the red glow that broke from the table. Then she lifted the ruby out and laid it out on the top. Wernawe approached the big stone cautiously as though he did not trust himself or his own ethics.

"Take that thing away," he said, "I have to earn my own living also." He giggled like a child. Then he gave Valentine instructions. "Above all, get this stone back for the lady," he said, "do you understand me? Now say something out loud."

So Valentine said aloud, "Are you ready for bed now, Felicie?"

"Turn out the light," Wernawe whispered. He pointed with his arm toward the window in the dark. The branches of the tree that stood near it were swaying visibly. Then the two of them vanished like shadows.

She would have called after them but she was alone . . . no, for a shadow passed across the window. She tiptoed into the front room. From there she could see moonbeams on the carpet and in their light she watched what

was going on. She saw the nervousness of the intruder, his irresolute fumbling around the room, his hand on the spring of the crystal table. When she heard him sliding down the tree again she came back. She rushed to the window, he was already running away. Beyond the road, other figures joined him. They started to duck into the Zoölogical Gardens but suddenly recoiled as if they had run their heads against the trees. Suddenly everything was alive, pursuit, feet rushing through the dark park, a weapon flashing, but not a sound.

She remembered with a rush of anguish how she had silently acquiesced when Valentine said he would rather die. She had even sacrificed the ruby to give him a chance to fall. She did not wish to give less than he, she gave her life. The ruby meant her life to her, meant triumph, meant success. It was her heart's own hard, cold, glowing talisman with which it could never go wrong. Now it had gone wrong.

"You are reaching the breaking point," she thought, "escape, save yourself while you have time. Or throw down your own life as well as his, that is even better."

A cry, a single cry of pain, suppressed as by someone who does not want his last agony to be heard, broke the untroubled stillness of the night. She staggered backwards into the darkest corner of the room, crouching together, she covered her eyes. She stood like that hearing footsteps approaching.

"Light," cried a cheerful voice. Still in the dark, she heard him say, "Well, everything came off according to schedule. The plan had go in it." Then there was a sudden light. She saw Valentine and began to tremble.

"From now on they'll let him alone," said Wernawe cheerfully. "He's shown what he's made of. Embrace him." If his words had not freed her from her fears, she would have thrown herself upon him, have crawled on her knees on the floor before him, to bathe him in her tears, in kisses hot with remorse. She said with a quaver in her voice, "Really, Valentine, I see now for the first time who you are. He's a man now, isn't he, Wernawe? He's grown older. How darkly he looks out of his eyes."

Valentine sought her hand and kissed it. She acted as though she did not notice what he

was doing. "Quick," she said, "the ruby. Has Wernawe got the ruby?"

Wernawe opened his fist. Red drops dripped from the red jewel onto his hand as though the stone were bleeding.

"Be a little patient, please," he said, see-sawing on his toes. "One poor devil was slashed with this jewel."

"Not by me," said Valentine.

"No, by me," Wernawe answered.

"Did you scratch his face with it?" she asked.

"No," said Wernawe, "but that fellow can never deny to the longest day he lives that he clawed the air a little. The surface of the jewel shows why." He ran his finger over the stone. He cleansed it and put it back in its place. She could close the little slot again, once more she could leave her heart's talisman safe in its hiding place. She had never believed that she would see it again. But the stone was not the same as it had been before. Between what it had been and what it now was there was no bridge: the stone was changed for her, her heart was changed. Valentine's face had that changed look, too. "I don't know my own son any more," she thought, "I wanted him killed

and I was prepared to destroy us both together."

Meanwhile Wernawe was giving advice to Valentine. "Hereafter, my good friend," he was saying, "there can be no going back for you. You have been through fire with us and you've got to stick by us now. That's our only chance for safety." But, as Valentine still declined, he went on, "What are you first and foremost? A soldier. Well, we're no pacifists, you've had plenty of opportunity to convince yourself of that. Man, you've gotten back to your old self simply in the little while since we started out after the rogues together. Ask madam if you haven't."

"It's ridiculous," said Valentine. "What you say is far from true, but you always fight shy of the truth. You and your crowd act in earnest? You never will."

"Oho, is that so?" said Wernawe and he named the total of voters who had stayed loyal in 1924. "They are our shock troops," he said. "We are stronger and more powerful than you think." Little Wernawe stretched himself to his full height. His manner was resolute. "We are life itself, " he said.

"You gentlemen want to talk," said the

Baroness. "Valentine, you know where to find the wine. Good night."

"And I was on the point of destroying both of us," she thought. "I will never again reveal the hiding place." She did not know herself whether she meant Valentine's or the ruby's.

She reached the front room. There she had to stop. She heard Valentine's voice saying, "I don't believe you. I will do business and I will also possess things. Whoever dares to do business wants possession as the badge of his success. You say you would not? Then I distrust you."

Wernawe's voice answered, "Are you a good hater? Then you'll act from that as well as anything else. And in action you'll find life, whatever you may make of it."

She rose from the chair and went into her room. She locked the door behind her and felt that for the moment she was saved. She bathed, the maid assisting. The accustomed step and the touch of the girl's hand easily deluded her although not one stone was left standing on another in the house of her life.

"So the ruby does not really matter," she

thought, stopping in the middle of a gesture, "and to think that I lived for it!"

Instead of going to bed she finally lay back in her easy chair. She smoked cigarettes, astonished at the steadiness of the hand holding the silk night robe against her breast. She watched her hand in the mirror. Only the night light was burning. In the depth of her mirror was a face. Beside it her firm hand stood out white. Was it really her hand still? She no longer felt strength enough to grip with it, she who no longer knew whether she wanted to sacrifice or kill herself. She could no longer distinguish love from hate. She had been afraid ruthlessly to make the most of her chance as the President had urged her to. But even this strange martyrdom for Valentine's sake did not suit her. She had come to it too quickly. She was not used to it. She would hate, it was in her nature to do so, . . . to hate those who consumed her body and soul, who made her old and poor. Only, she was his mother. One cannot be a mother and still wish her son to be killed. But can one be a mother and throw one's self upon one's son and bathe him in tears and kisses?

The minute she closed her eyes her troubles

broke in upon her like human things. She had to rivet her attention on her reflection in the glass in order to be sure that she was still a living creature who could not suddenly change.

And how could she hope to change after long discipline of hardship? Her ruby was no harder than that had been. "It is impossible for you to change your own nature," she thought, "that is the lot of weaker souls. You can't be going around weeping over your hard case either. For where can you go? Whom can you go to? Where can you go and not simply find yourself again? Your struggle, your sufferings? Who was there who would want to make her struggles his own? "Who cares to help you bear it all," she thought, "who would help you to conquer?" She knew who.

She mashed out her cigarette. Determined, she prepared herself for an important confession. She went up to the bed, the madonna that hung above it . . . she raised the image higher.

She began her prayer. She prayed standing as usual in front of the image with her eyes on the madonna. She did not fold her hands.

The prayer was ended. The image looked down coldly as always. She did not gaze long at it, she was used to it. Loud voices rang through the night from the young men below whose spirits were aroused by their contention. She prayed in a murmur and the image looked coldly down on her.

Its head was too big and it had little eyes and hardly any shoulders at all. The smooth blue mantle was fastened by a golden chain. Its crown was gold as was also the throne. This queen of heaven had no child; in place of one she carried a scepter. The old chrome print was crackled and hardly larger than a book. The frame outshone the picture in size, artistic effect and value. It was studded with red and yellow stones, lights of life.

The praying woman had known this heavenly face since she was a child. A young priest, the first man she had ever loved, had given it to her. She had loved him in confusion of soul with an excessive trust that often broke into shuddering and tremors of exaltation. And that was how, as a child, she had prayed to this picture.

Later in life the picture had changed, it had wanted to be worshipped in another way

later on. It shunned ecstasies, shameful confessions shocked it more and more. It had no desire to accompany her through sin, remorse and repentance. It had never reproached its worshipper with the exposure of her child. It had no child itself. It had a scepter and with that it helped its devotees to triumph.

In all the endless hotel rooms she had known, she had always taken it out of her bag and had hung it over her bed and prayed to it. Her days were filled with adventures more and more contrary to the desires of the picture, with business transactions, ambitions, avarice. Then at night she would seek justification from the radiant face of her picture. It always listened to her. It had never caused her to stammer in confusion. It did not seek to shame her. Worldliness, acting according to the world's way, did not really mean to work against God. On the contrary. God did not oppose success or salvation by shrewd business dealings, either for the praying woman or her picture. They understood one another, she and her picture. It would even forgive her acts which her unbelieving companions, perhaps, did not always forgive.

At every new stage she reached in her up-

ward path, she increased the number of stones around the frame.

Thanks to her picture, which was proud of its devotee and shared her life with her, she had not confessed to a priest for twenty years at least, though without ever in her own heart breaking with the Church. She never confessed and yet she was purged clean. In fact, confession came to seem to her like an ugly way of purging herself. She possessed the favor of a heavenly power which she carried around everywhere with her in her trunk. She did not need to go to confession.

Her prayer came to an end. Why was the picture inattentive tonight? The sound of her words was the same as usual. The picture loved her to utter her prayer according to ancient formula. The real sense of her prayer could only be secretly divined. The picture understood, however, and answered her just as secretly. Its red heart, that lay exposed on its mantle and sent forth rays, sympathized with her, had always sympathized with her. But tonight it was not touched. Was it offended? She wondered. It is days, I don't know how many, since I prayed last.

Her prayer went on, the picture did not

want to hear her. Its crimson heart did not let itself be touched by her. It no longer cared to know about things. In the interval, things had grown confused. The praying woman herself no longer understood them. How hard it was to explain them when she dreaded disapproval. She feared that the picture did not love Valentine. It had taken her worst misdeeds more sympathetically than this sin against her child, this resurrected emotion.

Of course, it never had approved of feeling. It stood for gain, prudence, self-respect. It was absolutely opposed to self-pity, waste, throwing one's self away. From the beginning she had felt able to tell it very little about Valentine, and then very reluctantly, hence the unusual interruption in her prayers. It was opposed to a deeper penetration of her life by her son. Now that that had happened it cloaked itself in silence. She said her Ave Maria and tried to tell it everything. Alas, in vain.

In her great need her picture was no help to her. At bottom it was warning her against all that it was no longer possible to change. She besought it to look for a moment at least into her heart, to understand it and never to

forsake her. "She will not be deaf to practical necessities," she thought, "if once she understands" . . . Then the first response came from the picture. "Confess that you have been weak," it said.

"No," she cried, "I am defending my own rights. I am fighting for my child as I once fought for money and possessions." The picture was silent again, impenetrably silent.

She grew excited, she forgot even the forms for her prayers, she spoke straight from her heart. "Don't you really believe in my sincerity any more?" she said. "The struggle is terrible, but I have great resources . . . not only in money, but I have the will to conquer as I have always had it . . . No don't listen to my boasting. I can't conquer any more without your help!"

She reached out her hands which had seldom been joined in prayer. She stretched them out and wrung them wildly, imploring help from the picture. She no longer stood in the presence of an ally. She knelt. Humility was written on her brow. She did not look up. "Do you believe in my sincerity?" she asked. The picture answered, "You have betrayed yourself."

"No," she cried desperately, sinking down in a heap. From then on it was the picture alone which spoke; she was broken. "You are bemoaning your fate," it said, "you are regretting your whole life. Confess that you have been worthless, you are ripe for dying beneath heavy wheels and letting others inherit your gains." Then the picture grew silent. She felt clearly that it had turned from her, that it had turned away from her forever.

She rose. She tottered and gasped for breath. Two loud young voices sounded remotely in the night. She felt how frightfully alone she was. And then what had never failed her before failed her now: she failed herself.

Her real nature was in full flight with the eyes of her need staring after it. They saw clearly enough what it was she was fleeing towards. Her refuge lay very distant, it grew dimmer. At the same time, she herself seemed to grow stronger. Gradually she felt as if she were immensely strong. A light streamed from that circular building to which her soul was fleeing and she who was left behind hoped that it might be morning which shone so

bright. She opened the window . . . no, night still lingered outside. What was there for the remnant that was left of her but to wait for the remnant of the night to go?

Chapter Six

THE church of St. Hedwig is a circular building. It stands a few paces from the statue of the king who built it, but it stands to one side and, in spite of its vastness, seems unobtrusive, like a stranger. Over the roofs of the houses that divide it from Unter den Linden peeps the Castle. On the left is Behren Street. French Street runs in back of it.

There is a lamp on one big cupola, a cross on the other. The saint in the act of benediction watches from the gable of the outer building. The inscription under the triangle of the gable, pays a tribute to the church and to the monarch who endowed it, and the liberality of a certain cardinal. Within the triangle a group of figures, nude or draped, ranges up obliquely to the tallest form, which is in the middle.

The gable is carried on six columns. Above these are reliefs showing the resurrection of Christ. Below are two middle niches and the three spires of the church. Ten steps lead up to it.

One of the spires rises straight up, the middle one. In the stillness of a mild and reticent Sunday morning, it reaches gradually into the empty air. It does not expect any entrants so early, although a woman in brown is already there. The old woman who opens the doors does not know where this stranger came from. She must have been waiting behind the columns.

The old woman recognized a lady and also noticed that she peered around into the dark circular interior as though it were strange to her. Each of the altar pieces is set between Corinthian columns. Behind them the stained glass windows glow. They are dazzling so that the high altar seems to disappear when you look for it. A wide railing halted the stranger, otherwise she could see nothing. She relieved her eyes by peering into the depth of the cupola. Oh, how empty it was, more mysterious even than an empty house. To what was it leading? Close behind every column was its gray shadow. Nothing to cling to, and yet . . . There was the diplomats' pew to the right of the organ where she herself had sat at one time.

She found the solemn altar piece again. It

was just as it had been long ago. On the far side of the railing the candelabra had illumined the high altar, all the holiness of the place and the privileged in their places. The church had been full. It was splendid with lights. Music swelled out, the music of the mass, sacrificial, purgative. But she no longer felt anything as once she had felt it.

She remembered one high festival when all society had gathered here. She was frightened. Behind every column lay its darker shadow. The depth of the spire bespoke only endless incertitude.

The visitor was asked if she wanted to be shown about. The old woman was standing before her. She hid her hands in her skirt and then began, "Frederick the Great gave the foundation for the church building," she said. "For thirty long years they collected the money for it in all Catholic lands. The swamp was drained." Immediately afterwards she broke off. "Berlin was a fishing village then."

"Isn't there a priest here yet?" the stranger asked.

The old woman was embarrassed. "Oh," she said, "so the lady is not a stranger. But I

never saw you before. Then you don't want to be shown around."

"Oh, yes, go ahead," she answered.

But she was an inattentive visitor. She let herself be dazzled again by the light from the stained glass windows instead of following the old woman to the place where she could see the group behind the high altar more clearly. "It is called Easter Morning," the old woman said, "it shows Christ greeting the sinful Magdalene."

"Who?" The visitor had suddenly turned towards the group. She seemed in a bad humor. "What else is there?" she asked. "Where are the fathers?" She gazed at the windows again. Was it only the picture she saw there?

"The holy fathers will come soon," the old woman explained. "The pictures in the window are of St. Hedwig, as you can read for yourself. The saint is holding a little church in her hand. The first of the two lower pictures shows St. Hedwig with a wounded man. It shows her castle at Liegnitz burning. In the second picture, the saint has recognized the wounded man as her lost son."

"How?" the stranger asked quickly. She

peered forward. "That's horrible," she said. "She must have recognized him before that."

"He had been away at the wars for a long time," said the guide.

"You mean that she was taking care of the wounded man like any of the others and that he was her own son all the time? Had she lost him? Was it he who set fire to her castle?"

"That isn't in the story," answered the guide.

"But it was he all the same. Is it always too late?" said the stranger.

"Do you want to hear mass?" the old woman asked.

"I want to confess," said the stranger, giving her a fee. The old woman was more embarrassed than before.

"You can't confess," she said, "we're holding high mass."

The stranger started to go. "There's beautiful music," the old woman said quickly, "an organ, an orchestra, a choir. Lots of people come here regularly now to hear it. Besides, there will be a full illumination." But the visitor was already hurrying away. The old woman fingered the fee in her skirt pocket. She felt that she had not done enough for

such a large tip. "You can still see the confession chapel," she said.

The stranger hurried on ahead of her and in the very direction she wanted to guide her. She hastened through the nave and reached the confession chapel. She looked around her. No, there was no confession bench, only silent stone figures. Though there were one or two living beings kneeling among them, the silence too, was stony.

The stranger gazed at the picture of the Mother of God kneeling by her Dead, then she, too, knelt. Her action had been so precipitate that the guide nearly stumbled over her.

The old woman drew back in astonishment. What she saw was no lady. No lady ever prayed in that way. No, she had never seen a lady stretch out her hands like that. No one she had ever seen bent her shoulders that humbly, or knelt. This was no lady after all. She was so poor, in spite of the silk she wore, that the old woman was ashamed to have taken her money from her. This stranger needed confession more than the old woman needed her daily bread. She whispered in the ear of the kneeling woman, "The rosary is at five. You can confess then."

Baroness Hartmann was back in St. Hedwig's before five o'clock. She saw the church filling with people. There was no place left for her to sit down, so she stood with many others in the aisle while, in the chancel, the priest's voice began the service. The voice was nasal, but resonant, so that not a word was lost. With no apparent effort the long sentences came from the compact figure. The priest never paused for breath. "Hail, Mary, you are full of grace, and with you is the Lord." Resting on his powerful hands, he spoke with composure. "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy body, Jesus, who sweated blood for us." His white stole did not quiver, he spoke so quietly.

And the congregation responded, "Hail, Virgin Mary, Mother of God, pray for us poor sinners! Pray for us now and in the hour of death." They uttered the words in monotone and all together.

Between the lords of this world's life and their wives and daughters, who are more frequently seen in other places, but who were now sitting there, knelt nuns and working women; even the young men of the congrega-

tion did not want to pray standing. They were irresistibly permeated by the priest's iterated formula. "Jesus who sweated blood for us" . . . over and over again. They must pray endlessly to the Virgin Mary until the formula changed to "Jesus who was crucified for us" and the last worshipper had felt its power and knelt. Even Baroness Hartmann wanted to kneel. A well-dressed man saw her. He ordered a servant girl to give up her place to her. "Pray for us now and in the hour of our death," repeated the servant girl stolidly. She left the bench, but her eyes never moved from the cross of glowing electric roses in the chapel at the left of the altar.

It was the rosary chapel. Covered with flowers, the Mother and Child stood on Their altar. The glowing cross cast a soft radiance over them. The altar stood in a half light that revealed Her and the Child gazing mildly down. "Jesus who was crucified for us . . . a child like that!" thought Baroness Hartmann.

The great vault of the church lifted its circular walls high above the crouching people. Their beseeching voices breathed forth manifold cares and bitterness. The air was

laden with them. Manifold cogent appeals for bodily health, for business success, for peace of mind or of soul: the air grew fervid with them. They were alone in the midst of the far-flung, beleaguering city. Each one prayed after his own fashion, addressing himself to remoteness and eternity. "Jesus who was crowned with thorns for our sakes." Round about them and, in the niches far above their heads, the twelve apostles watched, old men in attitudes of imposing power.

"Jesus who was crowned with thorns for our sakes," prayed Baroness Hartmann. She watched Him on the other side of the altar, . . . He, Himself was standing there white against the darkness, waiting to receive the Magdalene, who was kneeling to Him. It was easy for her to kneel. Repentance lay behind her, despondence and renunciation lay behind her, too. It was easy for her to kneel, her pride had already been shattered. She really deserved His contempt. In the morning Baroness Hartmann had hated her.

And now for the first time she understood the Magdalene, she began to understand her. "Jesus who bore the heavy cross for our sakes," . . . she prayed and, at the same time,

heard the Magdalene praying to Him, too, in spite of her remoteness.

Entranced, she heard and saw much more. Old voices returned to her, they drowned out the voice of the woman praying there, and yet it was through her alone that they existed. For several minutes she was alive again in the land of her birth, in her childhood's mountain village, with every one of her senses alert. The smell of smoke came back to her. She heard again the falling water of the brook. She saw the church among the rocks, the entrance and the interior. She felt herself a child among old people once more. O beating heart and transfigured vision, on the chancel under the golden canopy, the young priest appeared! "Jesus who bore the heavy cross for our sakes." Baroness Hartmann was frightened. Her own voice rang loudly in her ears again and she took it for the voice of the wretched village girl. She listened. The illusion was ended and she was there again as unhappy as at the outset of life, having shared the weeping of the wretched and sunk back exhausted. Did she still feel within herself the ways and means to lead her back along that road? Was that feeble child still

a part of her? She was afraid of herself. "Pray for us now and in the hour of death," she said with the others.

"Jesus who was crucified for us," said the compact priest with the nasal twang. She perceived how generously he strove. Was it good, after all, or advisable, to let one's self be penetrated by this hypnotic prayer, to give one's self over completely, to surrender one's spirit to it? She sought to find the way to her own spirit, but it eluded her as ever in its most ancient lurking-places. That high-perched little church threw wide its doors and the procession streamed out. It poured down the narrow staired streets with the child in its midst, barefoot among the clattering wooden shoes. At the head of the procession rose the crucifix, the boy next the young priest held it high, a soft wind disturbing the crown of thorns. "Jesus who was crucified for our sakes." These words were repeated and Baroness Hartmann responded patiently, "Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, pray for us poor sinners. Pray for us now and in the hour of death." She was very nearly entranced by it and excited in an aimless way, not having any clear idea what to do.

Then the organ! The rosary was ended. As the organ pealed and all sang together, the lady who was sitting in the servant girl's place arose from the pew. She touched the kneeling girl pointing to her to take back her place. She herself went her way through the crowded aisle between the pews. She asked everyone she touched to pardon her. She waited until each one made way for her. She looked at no one, but kept directly on her way to the confessional, at the left between the columns. Arrived there at last, she entered and, kneeling, drew the curtain above her. Behind the dark slit in the partition she sensed two eyes. In the direction of her confessor's eyes she said, "My name is Mary."

For a time she did not know what else to say but he had time to see who was before him. Women like her often came to him at this time, after prayer, when evening had fallen. They came from more or less troubled lives and, for a moment, like this one, they did not know what to say. He helped them to see more clearly into themselves. He taught them to see God's true purpose in the affairs of their lives and, wherever possible, pointed

out to them God's spiritual friendship. With rather forcible logic, he sent them back into that life with which, unfortunately, they were soon at odds again. Coming direct from life and its facts, they often sank down in confusion and bewilderment, like this well-dressed woman. He greeted her with, "Praised be Jesus Christ!" "Forever and ever, amen," she responded lifelessly.

"Let us begin," he said, even suggesting the opening words to her, "In the name of the Father, Son and . . ."

"And Holy Ghost, amen." She strove to keep her teeth from chattering but her next words came out of their own accord. "I confess before God Almighty . . ." she hesitated.

"The organ distracts you," he said politely, "it will stop again in a moment. In the meanwhile, collect yourself."

Had she not understood? She began again at the beginning. This time the words came out in spite of all hesitation. "I have sinned in thought, word and deed."

He considered what this might mean. Lack of practise, together with a child's reluctance to speak. At the very moment of her entrance

into the confessional, the woman had made a hesitant gesture. He was distrustful. Many women came here seeking something quite different from the sacrament of the confessional. Quite the reverse, they came looking for adventure. He said in a hard, matter of fact voice, "Have you searched your conscience? Have you repented? Do you come here with good intentions? If you do I will listen to you." The eyes shone coldly through the slit in the partition.

She found nothing more to say or even cause to say it. Her case seemed hopeless to her. How was she to begin? "It's all a question of money," she said suddenly and without meaning to. Why out of thousands of things she might have said, did she have to say that?

"What does that mean?" he asked abruptly. His eyes disappeared from the slit.

She was deeply alarmed. "Listen, reverend father, and I will tell you everything," she cried. "I have squandered my substance, that's it. I've had to buy my child back with money. But how could I be his mother without money? That was why I was grasping. Yes, avaricious. I had to be for my child, I know

it now. How else could he love me? Oh, I love him as if he were my own flesh."

"You were grasping? Covetousness when it harms others, is a mortal sin. Proceed."

"Am I unworthy of my child?" she asked in a piercing voice. "I abandoned him."

"You?" he said, "a rich woman? Then you must have sinned heavily in having him. Unchastity is a mortal sin. But you must have confessed long ago."

"I have been unchaste all my life," she said hastily, for so much else was thronging in on her, all crowding on her at once, that she grew bewildered and feared she might not be able to finish. Sins against the Holy Ghost: "I have deliberately neglected confessional."

"You did not confess?"

Sins that cry out to heaven: "I have brought death to men. I have oppressed the poor." Strange sins: "I have caused others to sin." She was amazed to find how filled and alive with truth all the old formulas of life that once she had learned by rote had now become.

He asked sternly, "When did you confess last?"

She saw his eyes again and felt herself pierced by them. She was suddenly arrested

while she threatened to totter as though from a high tower. "I don't know," she stammered, "not for twenty years or even longer."

"So that's it," he said, "I knew it."

"You knew it," she repeated obediently. After conquering herself, she said scarcely audibly, "Reverend father, do not forsake me."

She waited anxiously. Finally he decided. "In your heart of hearts you demand the sacrament of confession," he said, "you are on the true path to repentance but are still far from the goal. You must probe yourself earnestly and I am going to give you time for that."

"Are you sending me away?"

"Your probings of conscience need all the more time in view of the falseness of your life and the time you abandoned the confessional. But it is late now."

"Don't send me away." She stifled the cry.

"Come again when you can speak more collectedly," he said, "God will not permit Himself to be solicited in a wild spirit. Only the clearest spiritual thought can approach Him. You must be sure that you are willing to begin a new life. When you are, then come back.

In three days I will be waiting here alone for you."

There was nothing left for her to do but go. "I will think about you," he added.

In the church, which was empty and nearly dark now, a solitary figure was waiting. It crossed her path and went to the confessional. She recognized this figure. It was the servant girl whose place in the pew she had accepted that morning. At the entrance she gazed after her for a long time but the curtain of the confession box remained down. He allowed the servant girl to remain.

She made up for her lack of sleep the previous night. Then she countermanded her orders for clothes. The fitting would have distracted her from her more important tasks. A business conference had to be postponed. She also retracted an invitation and gave her servant his longed-for night off. She was creating silence for herself. Valentine and Kappus both thought she was travelling. In her own cool undisturbed room, she remained alone for three days putting in order all that was left her of the past. There were all of her letters in strata, year by year, a layer to a

year. Even her account books ran back into the past without a break. The figures in them came to life again under her eyes. It was different with the old photograph albums which had never caused her remorse before, since she never had looked at the faces in them after they were taken. Though later she had seen so many of them in her apocalyptic aberrations.

She ate almost nothing. She wanted to attain to clear spiritual thought of God and His relations to her, and of hers to Him. And to find out if this really was that moment of grace which she had heard transpired once in every human life. It was hard to tell. The indubitable fact remained that she loved her child, loved him to desperation. If God willed it so, that was in itself grace. But suppose God willed otherwise! She shuddered. She said to herself, "No emotions! I have accounts to settle." But these were only reminiscences of her days with the gilded Queen of Heaven who would now lie forever more in her box. Thoughts came, thoughts which were also calls, haling her back to what was remotest in her past, to the child she once had been, and even to the time when she had not been

one, that time from which she was hardly free yet.

The flood of her uncertainty finally came to rest at a single point, the memory of her father confessor. She saw him sitting, thinking about her ceaselessly. He had promised her he would and she believed him, as she no longer believed in anyone else, no, not even in Valentine. He had that fickle heart that all the living have and with which they try one another. The mind that was in the confessional seemed surer to her. It alone possessed strength to reconcile her to God, to reconcile her with all that she had been through.

To her wavering spirit, the demands that her suffering made on her were like nothing so much as dull blows in the darkness. Her spirit was full of contradictions which only the chaplain in the confessional might solve. He knew now that her name was Mary. He alone of all men called her Mary in his thoughts. Only he should hear her secrets . . . in twelve hours from now, and then only eight. She waited longingly to give herself into his hands. He would be thinking of her. His gaze was keen, his voice, when he wanted it to be, was as cold as ice. It ought

to be that way. He must be a man of about fifty, with the powerful shaven head of a thinker who has thought things through. She had not seen him, but she was sure that she knew him inch for inch.

Outside it was growing darker as she entered the church. Within a soft illumined intensity prevailed. It was satisfying. Take courage, she thought. A few scattered persons praying, otherwise the way to the confessional was clear. She walked towards it with a more youthful step than she had used anywhere for a long time. Still the eyes that peered at her were quick enough to appraise her. Looking at her, the priest thought, "This woman called Mary is happy at confessing and her joy is making her younger. It is obvious when a woman still hopes for something from life. They are incurable. The passion for repenting is only calculated to lead them on to other passions."

As she knelt he went on thinking, "The lower nature is profuse in them. They can never share in the spiritual struggle for God. At best they reveal their inscrutable natures to Him. O woman, you have been blessed at times by God, more than have we who strug-

gle. That is why we have to respect you. At the same time, we are commanded to distrust you. This woman who is kneeling will hardly be among the blessed." At that point he received her with the Catholic greeting.

She began, "I was poor and I went from sin to sin in order to become rich. But once I had become rich, the worst temptation of all assailed me."

"Who tempted you?"

"The President," she said.

"Name no names," he said, "say nothing that is not to the point. Tell me, are you married?"

"I am a widow."

"Are you speaking of sinful relations? What did this man you call the President want of you?"

"He wanted . . ." she could not bring herself to say it. She perceived that it was more than she had expected, . . . she was wildly terrified.

"Did you go with him?" he asked.

"No, but then I might always have done it," she said in alarm.

"What are you confessing for?" he asked. "So that you can go on sinning in peace? Pass-

ing contrition is not enough. God prizes will alone."

She sighed heavily. "I was a child whom God loved dearly," she said, "but I loved a young priest. And God forced on me the sin I abhorred."

"Don't blaspheme," he said.

"In the village where I lived I once accidentally saw two people sinning together. I was horrified. All human feelings died out of me at that sight . . . . forever, as I thought. I confessed to the young priest. I told him that I could never love again. I told it to him because I loved him. A little while afterwards I left my village and lived unchastely, . . . and continued to from then on. I hated it the more I gave way to temptation."

The kneeling woman spoke hesitatingly, leaning backwards. She found it painful, more fruitless than a long-desired confession ought to be. Of course, someone was still thinking about her. The thin wooden wall divided her from thought that was directed to her and to her alone.

"You left your village," she heard him saying, "because you no longer loved this person you call 'the young priest.' And you tasted

the world all the more avidly on that account. That was the beginning. You had one lover. Later you had others, but this one was the first. How did he treat you?"

"It is so long ago," she said faintly. But still more sternly came from beyond the partition the words, "No, it was but yesterday." It left her mute and she felt a long tremor passing over her. What caused it? A sense that time was as nothing here and that there was to be no forgetting. That even the poorest wretch who ever lived possessed the full value of the soul and that that soul was inestimable and eternal.

Suddenly she saw distinctly the face of her first beloved. "He was beautiful," she stammered, her shoulders twitching in a kind of terror, as though he still might see her. "He beat me, but he was beautiful and strong. He was a stable hand. I thought of nothing but him in all the world. I followed him wherever he went and finally to Berlin. I flowered in his love, I had luck with the gentlemen at his race track. He used to beat me but I would have committed murder for him. In Berlin he threw me out for the first time, then took me back again and then abandoned me. I got

a job. I was a poor servant girl. He wanted me to give myself to other men," she ended wildly.

"Whose was your child?" he asked.

"What?" It was mere formless sound. Her breath was gone.

"Who was the father?" he asked.

"I won't tell you that," she said.

"And what did you tell your son when you found him again?"

"That I did not know who his father was. Better that than the truth, better that than everlasting shame."

Then she heard the concealed thinker saying, "You hated your child for his father's sake."

She cried out quickly, "Not for long. Only while he was there. Only while he could look at me." She stopped. "How do you know that?" she asked. "Can it be that I do still hate him, even now?" she asked poignantly.

No answer came from behind the partition, but her own thoughts told her, "Yes, I may hate him still, even by loving him. I could kill him as though I hated him. What is happening to me?" Is this the present or the past? She spoke as though it were the present but

the features of the past kept swimming before her. They raged savagely like old tortures. She might go on stammering out what she now for the first time began to feel once more, but all that she told him was her old pain.

She saw and spoke only in the past. A figure glided towards her from the past, slid around the corner, veiled beyond recognition, the abandoned woman, the woman out of work carrying her unborn child. By the canal near the bridge-lamp appeared her pallid face, with eyes immense from frenzy, framed in that coarse black veil so often worn by desperate girls headed for the water. . . . A hand stopped her on the brink. They would not let her die. She would have to give birth. She even found a job.

No sooner in service in a house that was a refuge to her, and already reconciled with life, than her existence was threatened again, for her child was brought back from the home. She could not afford to pay for it there. But no one need know about it.

Once more the old journey to the water, and this time under the suicide's dress was the child. It was alive. It looks at you, she

thought. You can no longer decide to die. You cannot kill it. . . . What agony, only in order to do in the end what tortured her most. At last she found herself at the point she had started from, only now much weaker. There was the house she served in. It meant peace to her forever. It would hide her. Only leave the child somewhere! Over there by the fountain. As though compelled she went towards it. Her heart had stopped beating.

She opened her shawl. The child slipped out like a piece of silver. "The moonlight fell across his face and he smiled. I felt easy, fearfully easy. I went back to my kitchen and sang. It was that way for the first half hour, or was it less?"

"Did you go back to the fountain?" he asked. "Was your child gone?"

"With my own eyes I saw a man carry it into the house. They took it in there. I, his mother, who could not afford to bring him up, often heard his voice. I slipped around their house and even into their garden. My feet were noiseless in the snow. I used to stand in one spot and peer in their windows. I saw shadows but not his. Never his. But I could hear him crying. Then I knelt in the crisp

snow and wept, too, tears so hot that they melted the snow. The worst of it is that I had to forget this when things went better with me. I did not weep any more and I never knelt in the snow again."

"Heavy sins! Your heaviest sin," said the father confessor, as though speaking from a distance. The woman raised her distracted eyes towards the slit in the partition, but she saw nothing. Even his voice seemed to have passed away and only came to her as from a dream. Pitch darkness, utter silence. She did not know what he was saying and what she was merely dreaming. "But because of this sin all the others can be forgiven you. You began the others in order to be happier, this one alone because of wholesome curative suffering . . ."

Perfect silence.

Suddenly his clear voice spoke again. "Your sins should be before you like hateful monsters. Your confession should not enhance the charm of your sins for you. Consider this before you say more."

"I know," she said, "for everything that seemed like good fortune in my life was at

bottom only God's punishment for my heaviest sin. I went on sinning more. And from the start I was lucky. A wealthy man took up with me. I see now that he was kind. But now, too, I know what kindness means to the aging. I took vengeance on him for all I had suffered, all I had gone without. I was tireless in demanding luxuries. Oh, how wonderful the world can seem . . . at eighteen! He was three times as old as I and he bought me the world before he gave up disillusioned. He left me with a little money and much well-earned hardness. With this as capital I increased the money."

She talked undisturbed to herself. "Business brought me more than money. I got value from it, a station in life. Without money there is no inner poise . . . for me, at least, in my position. Then several more misfortunes overtook me. Whether or not I was the cause of my own misfortunes, or others were, I have never found any third way of life."

A thought that she had half forgotten asked, "Did you break the seventh commandment?"

"No, I merely lived without it. We all live without it."

"You are accusing yourself lightly," he said. "Money affairs are like the other base things of the world: God to Whom nothing in His world is strange, has willed them to be also. He makes Himself known to you and in your nature through base things."

She said with conviction and wearily, "Reverend father, you do not know the rich. No rich man has one good thought even in his inmost soul. You cannot know how bad they are, reverend father. He who spoke of the rich man and the eye of a needle knew it, though."

The other's thought broke in vehemently. "No pride!" he said. "You are merely giving way to pride when you accuse yourself of avarice. You were greedy from pride as much as anything. And still you want to judge the world? There is nothing driving you to pass judgment on wealth, which comes from God, too, just as pride does. Take care, it is a mortal sin . . . and the first of the seven."

She was confounded. Several times she intended to answer but remained silent. What was it? She was sure of her case even now. She had dearly bought, mysterious knowledge, but it was poisoned at its source, it

flowed away from her and was knowledge no more. All that had seemed firm in her till now proved to be nothing more than smoke accidentally given off by her secret passions. Everything seemed wavering and unstable to her but, above all else, she now feared herself. She feared, too, that thought, unmasking everything, behind the thin wooden partition which she touched. Did he mean her, transparent and unreserved, to throw off even the last deceptions before God? She was afraid of herself.

His mind waited until she was sufficiently humbled before it, then he asked, "What did you do with your money?"

She wanted to say, "I bought a husband with a noble name." She stammered over it until he began to understand. He asked, "Then you were no longer living in a state of sin against the sixth commandment?"

She was silent in order not to tell the truth from pride. She no longer trusted herself. Sins might be merits, but contrition might be pride. That was the way she hated Valentine who was, at the same time, so dear to her. She would have given her life for him and, at the same time, could have killed him. All that

she had done in life she seemed to have done for his sake. But because of this her own interior world had fallen into incertitude.

"Did you continue to sin against the sixth commandment?"

"I grew up solitary and alone in the world because of my sensuality. My first lover was beautiful and strong, a stable hand."

"Don't repeat! Don't arouse unchaste images!"

"But everything that happened was unchaste. . . . I lived on sensual images. I did not want men's money alone. I wanted them as men, their flesh and blood and everything they let me feel through them. My eyes and ears, my blood and all my senses were alive to men. They could only defraud me of themselves by dying. If I did good, it was not for God's sake, but for the sake of flesh and blood. What my head may do, and whether or not it aspired to good, whether or not it prayed . . . that, too, was all vapor of the blood."

"The prayer of one who humbles himself pierces heaven." His voice grew threatening. "But you add to all the rest of your sins the doubt that God is good. You disparage His whole creation in order to hold yourself su-

perior to it and apart. But nothing more has happened to you than that the devil, as usual, has forced his way in through your imagination in order finally to control your will. Miserable wretch, don't you see that it is nothing but your incurable pride that has entangled you in tighter and tighter toils? You need nothing more urgently than self-abasement."

As she made no movement whatsoever, he commanded curtly, "Answer my questions directly. Were you true to your husband?"

"He died single; we had never known one another."

"Because he died?"

"Because I did not wish it. Because I saw that he loved me instead of simply selling me his name. Because I despised him for that. Because I only love where it will do harm."

"How long have you known that? Think before you answer."

"Another man whom I loved fiercely robbed me and wanted to abandon me. I took him to law for it and he was convicted. Shall I go on?"

"When did you begin to remember the child you abandoned?" he asked.

"When life was becoming dull and lonely for me. When nothing else was left for me to love and to ruin."

"In what way did you ruin your son?"

"With money. I bought him. Like all the rest, I bought him, too. I held my money over him like a punishment."

His thought, which she had disturbed, was silent this time, was silent longer than before. She felt she was reaching a turning point. She felt a chill invade her even before he spoke.

"Can even a mother be guilty of ruining her son?" he said. "It would be impossible if you really were his mother."

"I am his mother," she said.

"Then it follows that you must love him as though you were. Then you would come to him with a heart overflowing with kindness. Is it as I say? You would have to love whomever he loved. You would sooner refuse to see him than to mislead him."

"Would that it were so," she said.

"How do you love him then?" he asked.

For a moment she stopped breathing. "Jealously," she broke out. "I hate his false mother. I hate his sweetheart. I hate all those

around him. And I hate him, too . . . because he does not belong to me alone."

"How do you love him, then?"

She did not heed his dark and menacing mind. All passion forsook her. "Desperately!" she cried out. "I want to kill him, no, I want to die for him. I would persecute him, but only to seize him for my own. I am mad. I am lost . . . and will lose him soon, too."

"How do you love him?" asked the mind, uncannily soft, so piercingly soft that she had to listen to it.

"What?" she said distrustfully. "As my child," she added, "how else would I love him? But I want my own child for my son."

"Have you coveted his presence? Can you not bear to have him away from you? Do you cry out for him at night?"

"Yes, for he is my child," she said.

"Did you entice him to you by wiles and by force?"

She gasped, "Yes."

"Have you compared yourself with other women because of him? . . . Have you even gone so far as to bare your body for him? . . . Was he humiliated by you, by his mother? And you, did you enjoy it all sinfully?"

She was petrified. . . . "Now I will have to shriek," she thought, "now I am going to shriek." But no sound came. She felt she was choking and flung out her arms to clutch the curtain. She was in full flight. She fled from the confessional. She staggered away, broken and senseless. Suddenly she recollected herself.

"No!" she cried, "no!" and she staggered faster through the darkened church. It echoed emptily. A hanging lamp in the distance seemed her only hope. Reeling, she steadied herself step by step around the circular walls.

"The President," she said, suddenly seeming to see him, as if he had reared himself out of the darkness, "the President thought that I loved Valentine as a man. I didn't understand him until this moment. Well, some time ago I had a moment's suspicion of what was coming. The truth has been coming closer to me for a long time, steadily closer. Oh, I suspected it long ago. . . . No, not the truth, it is not the truth," she cried again and again, but more faintly with each cry. At the same time she tottered, pausing at times with attempts at returning, but the circular wall

brought her to her goal of its own accord. She had made a long and weary journey and arrived dead tired. There she was again. She knelt in the confessional.

"Confess," said the mind, tormenting her, pressing her, as though it were within her. "Put aside your human pride. Say from the inmost recesses of your soul: 'I, poor sinner.' "

She struggled with herself for words. He helped her struggle, each of them felt the other's need in his own.

"You have deceived not men but God, said Peter to Ananias. And so I say to you again, so I ask you again: Do not cloak your deep sins. Do not lie before God. I know that you have recognized your sins. Sin can only exist when we have recognized it. You have recognized it and you are now confessing."

He had been violent and rough, but he became gentle. "Lighten your load by a good confessional," he said, "afterwards you will feel revived and free and hell will have no further terrors for you."

He waited. Then as he heard her breathing heavily far below him there, he commanded, "Cast a glance into the abyss of hell. You

shudder. A confession in which you conceal a grave sin brings you neither forgiveness nor peace of mind."

She whimpered. Then, for the first time, she once again grasped, as she had when she was a child, how serious this was, and she realized what was threatening her. "Reverend father, save me," she whimpered.

He commanded her gently. "Take pity on yourself, my good woman."

"I can't," she said, feeling she could not, "even though hell seized me now." Then she heard groans stifled as though someone had pressed his face into his hands.

After a pause, he said decisively, "I cannot give you absolution. Your sin is unusual and difficult to pardon. Besides, you are not ready for the confessional. My responsibility would be too great. I will take your case to my spiritual superiors."

She thought, "If I could only say, 'Do as you like.' I will say it."

Then he said, "One thing I can assure you of now, you must avoid the next opportunity you have to sin again." Then incisively, "You must not see him again."

She screamed. "Not see him again! That

can never be. I'd rather die. A thousand times rather die."

"You?" he asked, "A believing woman? Can you be so weak? God has no use for weaklings, faith is not a business for weaklings. It belongs, like all the rest, to the strong. A great believer has as much strength as a great conqueror. Consider what you are doing. Have you not been strong in life? You must go on living. You must repent."

He had recalled her strength to her and she arose. From the other side, he, too, came out of the confession box and she saw him. She was amazed; he was a young man. His face was not stern as she had imagined it. It looked bewildered by the long-drawn struggle. Her own could have not been more distracted. In the state he was in he saw nothing. He did not even see her although they were looking straight at one another. Perhaps also those deep and ardent eyes never saw anything other than their own thoughts. He was well-knit and seemed to have healthy blood under his intellectual pallor. As though from pure abstraction, the wrinkles around his eyes seemed to smile, and he immediately became aware of the seriousness of the situation again.

He knitted his brows sharply, so that they rose like gables over either eye and formed a triangle. She thought at once of the triangles on the façade of the church in which all the figures graduated up to the tallest.

Her practised senses perceived all this even in the dark. The chaplain took off his stole and his choir robe. He said in a colloquial tone that it had grown late and that meanwhile the church had been closed. He beckoned her with his hand to follow him, while stooping, as though he wanted to make himself invisible to her, he hastily led her through the confessional to the entrance. She observed that his hand was well-cared for. He wore fine shoes. The sacred vestments had a modern fit, tight clinging hip-lines and broad shoulders.

She slept the sleep of the dead. After every awakening she plunged back into the solitary and saving, dreamless darkness. But another day dawned and she suddenly saw what night alone had hidden from her, saw herself and her condition nakedly. In the silence of her room, she screamed aloud. Then she held her

breath as long as possible, to hear whether the sound would pass away.

It lingered. She ordered her auto and made business calls till noon. From Kappus she demanded money for the villa at Heringsdorf. They would have to move into it soon since the marriage was approaching. He did not want to hear about it. She had suffered considerable losses, he declared. Her tenants were slow in taking possession. At the same time, he secretly determined that the Vogel von Lambarts would soon be in debt to him for as much as his friend had given them. He had labored for her. The villa in Heringsdorf, which she was buying for the young people, he could recover as a pledge. . . . And then he drew back as she handed him her will.

She hurried on . . . in order definitely to recognize that there could be no escape. No matter where she fled she remained imprisoned. No one but that mind could have shaken her so. And he alone could strengthen her again. She had to satisfy him. She had to cleanse herself in his sight. Repent!

"And how?" she asked herself. "By never seeing my child again?"

She was home again. Outside someone was ringing. She knew who. It was his voice and she trembled hearing it. As the door opened to let him in, she fled. Then she saw his astonished face. How much there was he did not know! How much that all of them at home with him did not know! She thought of him, together with the rest of them, and at that minute she despised him. "If only I could have him," she thought, "I will call him." And then she despised the world of those who know nothing of what is going on around them, who are not responsible for anything, the world in which turmoil like hers did not occur.

She breathed out turmoil. Turmoil had whipped her breast until an unimaginable, hellish radiance seemed to stream about her. She said to herself, "What is it all about anyhow? Nothing has happened, after all. I don't want to call him." But in a way it had happened, since she had thought it. And then a bright light flowed through that former dream in which she had transformed Valentine into her lover. All her dreams flamed up before her, became actual, demanding that she acknowledge them.

She lived two days that way. Then she returned to the church of St. Hedwig. She asked for her priest and waited patiently for the time when he would come. She asked him what decision he had reached. He told her that for her there was nothing but complete conversion. She would have to give herself up entirely to this turning point in her life as she had previously to her fall. "Will you receive grace? Grace is God's mystery. He gave us wills and we must struggle. . . ." He named as the scene for her severest struggles a house of penitence in the country. She would remain there the prescribed number of days. She would speak to no one and, like all the others, would let herself be governed in her cure by the master of exercises. The union with God could be achieved there through a conscious course of action, in conjunction with contemplation and spiritual exercises and a definite ordering of her exterior life.

She bowed her head. Then he saw that she could hardly stand for weariness and was weeping without being able to check herself. He took her hand. He was alarmed. "The confessional should not be a rack," he murmured, "it should bring peace, not destroy it.

Go and God be with you . . . Mary." He knew her by no other name.

She went and had her things packed. She was away, no one knew for how long. No one could find out more. Though Valentine came and asked for her, he could find out no more. She took a taxicab to the depot from which she was leaving. She remained unknown.

In the evening she sought her way through the unfrequented streets of a small city and found a high-walled garden and a gate that opened dark and noiseless before her and which, when she looked behind her, had already closed.

Chapter Seven

WHEN she returned she was no longer suffering. In the home she had made a complete confession and was now absolved. Behind her, livid with her sin, lay a closed chapter of her life and she would never have to reopen it. There was nothing more in the past to regret. Even the desires of that time had been left behind her. They really had been and Mary no longer suffered from them. She even dared to hope now. She hoped for a higher fulfillment later when God Himself would unite mother and child and permit her to be a mother again.

She did not suffer now, but, like all convalescents, she was afraid of relapses. "The sacrament of repentance could save you, but it can also bring you closer to despair," she thought. Suppose your nature had not grown strong enough for it. After a relapse it would be worse for her than before in her old days of incertitude. Above all, she was firm against self-deception. "Are you ready to hold up

your criminal misdeeds again as something sacred?" she thought. Stay clear, stay clean. Simply keep always in mind that the benefit of the sacrament is working in you, in your poor nature that wavers so under the stress of life. It is difficult, it is almost impossible, but you must find courage.

The priest of St. Hedwig's did not believe strongly in grace but demanded will. He held it safest to give no opportunity to temptation, to keep the tempter out of sight.

Her second father confessor was of a different opinion. He demanded that she give no cause for offense but that she attend her son's wedding. She begged in vain to be released from this duty. Then she obeyed and went to Heringsdorf. She took the room which had been prepared for her in the villa.

By good luck he was still away. The wedding day was set for Sunday and she had got there in the middle of the week. The General's wife was shocked by the first look she took at Mary.

"The President won't let Valentine go before Saturday," she said, "Valentine has become indispensable to him. Do you know that he's now the President's private secretary?

You are looking wonderfully improved, my dear."

As the Baroness said nothing about her disappearance it was simply assumed that she had been at some cure or other. They all accompanied her on a tour of the house. The rooms were barren. The sixty year old furnishings were of mahogany and plush, but in the abruptly inclined mirror she saw a tossing misty blue expanse reflected . . . the sea.

When her room had been opened up and the sea-wind blew through the windows, the General said, "Baroness, allow me the pleasure of presenting you with these roses from the garden on the occasion of your arrival." Even the Professor dangled a bouquet behind his back.

"Your room is the best one in the house," the General's wife observed, "at first there was trash all over the place. You should have smelt some of the wonderful smells in it. But we'll renovate it now and settle down here. Valentine has a career ahead of him."

"I hope so with all my heart," said Mary. The young Princess had simply stood and stared at her, longer than ever before, but suddenly, as if she had never known this Mary,

she bent forward and kissed her hand. Then Mary said how grateful she was for the beautiful room, which really was the best one, and for the roses and the balcony overlooking the sea.

"It's right above the terrace where we'll be waiting for you," said the General. Then they left her alone. Mary kissed the General's wife.

She remained standing a while in front of the window, feeling better because she had managed to keep silent in front of them. She would have preferred to avoid those steps which she fancied she heard below her. She did not want anyone to see how her face had changed. But let everything that might happen to her here, happen before the mask that she held to the world and not to her soul. Here they went on living as though the world out of which she had just come, and which still tugged at her, did not exist. Of course they had done nothing that would have jeopardized their souls eternally. Even the General's wife, whatever else one might say about her, had done nothing that endangered her soul eternally. When Mary had thought of this,

she had humbled herself and kissed the General's wife.

Downstairs the General was asking his wife, "How does she seem to you?" And, as his wife shrugged her shoulders, he declared, "She's terribly changed, even though for the better."

"Why shouldn't she reduce?" his wife said. "She needed to." The General's wife improved on her remark. "She's as thin as a rail now, though it makes her look overgrown. I'd rather not have her eyes on me every day in the week," she ended impatiently.

"She must have gone through something terrible," the General said.

"We've gone through enough ourselves."

"And still do," said the General. He found something more than the usual traces of human suffering in that face. It had grown leaner, though paler and softer. The eyes lay sunk in their dark shadows. Above all, the wrinkles around her mouth gave it an impression of repose that was remarkable. Were not most people becoming less peaceful nowadays? The end ahead of all of them was not much to boast of, of course. And who was

there who could still become as a little child with eyes that are quiet and penetrating, but which can cause others, too, to think the deepest thoughts? The General had had a pretty severe attack of gallstones in the not distant past and he was afraid to eat much. It was better to go hungry, but it made him susceptible.

"I don't like her color," said his wife. "Besides everything takes place too fast with her. There must be some inner cause."

The General had a suspicion as his wife still had, that cancer played some part in these changes. But he was less in harmony with her than before so that he was more than usually polite in excusing himself to go play chess with the Professor. The Princess had gone bathing.

Mary saw her from the upstairs window. The young girl's fair skin had tanned. There was a good deal of that skin, too, her light suit covering no more than an apron would. Out in the garden, she placed her two hands on the nape of her bobbed head and began to spin around, slowly at first and then faster. Her smooth short hair flew out and stood upright and splendid around her head. Her

bright face became a blur, and her thin arms were all one motion. Her white body turned like a top. Suddenly she stopped. All the livelier for her strenuous exercise, the young girl bounded towards the beach. She ran down the path in front of the house and soon was wading in the sand. Half way to the water she vanished into a bathing machine.

The beach was empty, probably because so many people were still dozing after dinner while every plot of sand and sea waited patiently for the owner of the villa in back of it to appear. This was the row of villas in the direction of Ahlbeck, before the woods begin. The house stood deep in gardens with rose-bushes under its gray terrace. Seen from above, the beach looked silvery. It grew darker near the sea which lay calm and blue and white. Out of it rose the heavens, like translucent mist from which gulls flew up, nothing more. The sea-air smelt of vastness. One felt alone.

Mary put her heart on trial. She waited till the young girl had left the bathing machine so that she might know more precisely what it was that she was on the verge of feeling. Was it hatred that threatened to burst forth? This

young Princess had been spinning herself around like a top in the sun all the while that Mary had been kneeling in the house of penitence.

That house had had a room for reporting one's hourly progress, and a chapel. From morning till night they made pilgrimage from one to the other. No mere curtseying was allowed, either. The law there was: your knee to the ground. It was also: labor and digest in meditation what was preached to you. It was: be conscious of your sins every moment of the day, and the last minute before you fall asleep pray for the grace of a peaceful death.

All acted together but silently. They ate at the same table, received the same exhortations on the end of human life, on death . . . but not one word was permitted among them. "Nameless and speechless you wander with your poor soul amidst the patient and stolid flock that is pastured here," she had thought. Learn independence, learn poverty again among faces gray with care; learn it with the coarse food, between the white-washed walls. Be strong within yourself alone, and yet be like all the world. At first she had revolted, so that all the others prayed for her submis-

sion. The result was that in the end she prayed for herself, too. Then she surrendered and inspiration came. And finally love came.

O white-washed cell, one spot on earth that is really mine. Hard ground, this knee is pressing you. Above is my one Lord, is the Cross, the blood-red image of my sins. He, the Crucified, calls to me, "Behold thy works!" I take an oath, never to sin again as long as I live . . . while, with my eyes that will never again look into another's, I love to see His eyes closing slowly. I have thoughts that are permitted only to Him and to me. This room receives them and cherishes them. At last it is soaked through, as no other room ever was, with my spirit's labor. Now I must leave it, I am afraid, although I am free of my sins, that I am leaving too much of myself behind me. I look around once more: help me to remain what I was here! . . .

At that moment Mary noticed a white spot on the blue surface spreading calmly before her. Her eyes were still as good as a child's or she could never have made it out: the Princess. That bright spot far out there is everything on which the great event depends. She held her breath as though listening. And then

all at once it was settled, quietly and simply; she loved that bright speck, loved the silly little Adele like her own child, like Valentine. Even as far as he was concerned she knew there was nothing to fear. She had gladly conceded him Adele and his youth. All that was fated to be: she could go downstairs to them, comforted.

Downstairs the Professor had checkmated his friend. It was a good thing, the General was thinking meanwhile, that it was spiritual excitement of some sort which usually got him over his attacks. And there was medicine in the house, besides.

The Professor was saying, "How it all works out! Now that my Princess is marrying, I get my new teaching appointment. Fate might have dealt far less generously."

"You are a lucky dog, my dear friend," said the General out of politeness, for really the satisfaction of this happy man began to pall on him. "A Professor at such a celebrated school," he said.

"I was called to it," the Professor declared. "Of course, it's true, too, that they're buying me, though naturally I've time enough for

myself. If I meant to base my reputation on my historical researches alone I'd find out that they're unfortunately a little out of date." His pleasure moderated and his friend found him very much more agreeable that way.

"I have to live," the Professor said, "for the Princess has to live. Because of that I've done things that I'll never be able to answer for. For example, I'd never be able to justify my historical forgeries for the cinema, if all contemporary society did not justify them for me. But they're useful to the ruling interests, hence my success. Who can afford to pay for success today except the ruling interests and they pay only for services rendered. Of course, it's not very creditable to me, but swimming against the current requires too much strength. Even the university appointed me, in the last analysis, because of my work for the films. There's not much credit in that either. But, my dear friend, there's a way of looking at everything. You have to know how to take things."

Melancholy, deep melancholy, in the midst of his deep-rooted happiness. It made the General trust him more than ever and he determined to speak to him about the disquiet-

ing symptoms of his own disease. He took his arm. The friends wandered around the terrace.

The General's wife, in the meantime, was wandering around the house. Once she even went as far as the stranger's door to see if she had not come out yet. At that very moment, she did come out and the General's wife did not have time to disappear. She let the other woman go downstairs while she remained above . . . from lack of decision, from helpless embitterment at her fate.

She had not made a reality of her dream. Valentine was not rich yet and the Princess had no dowry either from the President or Baroness Hartmann. Her respect for the Baroness Hartmann had increased; she took her for the shrewder of the two. In the President she recognized a certain power, irresistible, no doubt, if only she had the courage to utilize it. But she had not been a cultured woman for a whole lifetime for nothing. Actualities pressed on her. In three days it would be hard to change anything.

The General's wife did not think it of any particular importance that her penniless son was going to marry a poor Princess. To come

out openly against it would put a woman of her sort into a false light. But what did Baroness Hartmann still stand to lose? The General's wife had planned disappointments enough for her, but the Baroness might be able to help her again in her extreme need. The General's wife made up her mind. With sparkling eyes she entered the drawing room.

"Alone, Baroness?" she asked. "Is the Princess still bathing? I don't see her in the water now. Oh, there she is on the promenade. Doesn't she seem coquettish to you, too? Poor thing, an admirer like the President is enough to turn anyone's head."

Baroness Hartmann was shocked, which did not escape the General's wife. "Quite right," she said, "it is shocking that he never lets her alone for a moment. I suppose that he'll make his last proposal in the church just before she goes up to the altar with Valentine. . . . I'm not mentioning the danger that the President signifies to their young marriage."

"Is the danger any greater than in most marriages?" Mary asked. "The President is old, sometime he'll realize it. But the two children are in love with one another."

"If only it were as simple as that," said the General's wife, politely, regretfully, "but the fact remains that on Valentine's side, the whole thing began with sympathy and I question whether sympathy should ever go as far as marriage. Some day he'll notice that no one thanks him for it. It's quite reasonable," she said suddenly changing her tack, "you can't tie a Princess to you if you can't support her decently."

"I don't understand you," Mary said.

The General's wife flushed. "Like a little child," she thought, "when will I ever learn to meet people on their own plane?"

"Don't let us make any bones about it," she went on without any pretence at courtesy, "we know that Valentine has not a single source (her tone and glance indicated what source she was thinking of) to turn to for real help. Quite the contrary, as the result of favors which were forced on him and which he did not resist determinedly enough, he is now in the hands of a money-lender . . . and the man is not the kind to let anyone escape him very quickly."

"I'll take care of that," Mary said, "I'll speak on behalf of Valentine to Herr Kappus

and also to the President." Mary remained perfectly calm. To the General's wife she looked pallid. In spite of all her adroitness, the adventure with Valentine must have aged the Baroness.

"Old people ought to be more careful," she said, "but it's useless to talk to the President. You'd do better to talk to Valentine."

"So that he won't marry the Princess Adele? No." Her intonation brought back the vanishing respect which the General's wife felt for her. Suddenly she grasped the situation again: this Hartmann woman wanted Valentine to marry in order that he might be bound that much closer to her. His marriage to the simple Princess had been managed by her. She was cleverer than the President who did not know how to wait.

The General's wife murmured, "Everything might still be all right, if the Princess did not have certain depths in her nature. We can never be sure that we know them."

As her opponent looked at her disquieted, her nerves braced themselves for a little longer effort. "Everyone has unknown depths in his nature," she said, "even though personally, I only grasped this fact a short time ago. You

can believe me that my present position has taught me to know human beings. Events decide what's good for us," she said. She expanded this theme.

"Why, what does the Princess do?" Mary asked at last. "What are you talking about?"

But the General's wife had no intention of giving away even as much as she knew, which was not a great deal. The Princess was concealing a shameful secret and Valentine was helping her. It was the last that most embittered the General's wife. She had to accept what she neither spiritually nor morally approved. The best part was that they did not know she knew. But it would have been enough to cause an aversion in the General's wife even to a rich Princess; to a poor one it had become something not far from hate.

Of course she thought that it was only Baroness Hartmann whom she hated. In order to wound her the General's wife went on talking. She spoke tirelessly and, in the enjoyment of her own words, even grew polite again, that is she chose to be polite with a hidden meaning in words. She spoke with open gestures and a sparkling glance.

The General saw this. His wife was ex-

pending herself too lavishly, the other woman was sitting too silently. It made him uneasy, he left his friend and came nearer. What the General's wife was saying did not matter: her mounting inspiration was growing incomprehensible. As a result, Baroness Hartmann's face seemed momentarily to age and suffer.

The General had not the slightest desire to mingle in the affair. His intention was rather to put an end to all unpleasantnesses. Only, he could not help seeing masks everywhere these days instead of familiar faces. His increasing sickness made him more distrustful than he could have believed possible.

He had begun to suspect something deep in all human beings, not secret weaknesses; he was thinking of fate. Otherwise he would have mistaken the rôle for the man. Now he found in his own wife the outlines of a new personality. This was the first thing that disconcerted him. His wife was doing things that were not right. How shocked she would be if she could really see herself! The woman sitting in front of her was her victim, that much was plain to anyone. The General's wife was stranger to her husband than she had ever been before. In a shocked sort of way, he

pitied this creature who was struggling there. He stood with his head bent on one shoulder.

"Suppose we go for our walk now," he suggested, but all that he got for an answer was a sharp look, while there was no interruption in the steady flow of talk. But neither did the other woman show any inclination to rise. Was she really a victim? What must she not have gone through to be unable to tear herself away from here? Even she was waiting apparently until the intruder should go away, then both of them would immediately continue talking again about whatever it was held them together. . . . The General withdrew.

He sat down at the chessboard near the door that opened on the terrace. The door jamb cut off the view of the table so that in the next room they might very well believe he was sitting across from his friend. But no one was sitting there; the Professor had gone after the Princess. The General arranged the chessmen. He began to play for two people. While he was thinking what moves to make, a difficult problem, confused destinies presented themselves to his mind behind each move.

"Why am I sitting here alone?" he wondered. "Inside two women are worrying themselves over Valentine. I knew one of them once. Now both are strangers to me. I don't trouble myself about anybody and nobody troubles himself about me."

He reproached himself for his inopportune emotional upset and concentrated on his Opponent's features. Suddenly he felt uncomfortable. He looked half around and confirmed his suspicion. A turning point had been reached inside, a transfer of power from one side to the other. Now it was his wife who was sitting there crushed. She was staring straight in front of her like an old woman while the Baroness was openly charging her with what she was doing, with what was becoming of her. The General shrugged his shoulders. He considered his Opponent's face, a queer impression came to him. He was glad that he had this Opponent. Though he was secretly a little dazed, it occurred to him at once to ask, "Is it a tragedy?" He meant the business inside.

His sense of uncomfortableness returned, it was even stronger than before. A kind of tremor told him at last that it was not only in-

side that dark things were taking place. "I have no son," he thought. "How did I come to lose my son? One day a stranger came . . ." He made a face which proved to be less spiritual than that of his Opponent.

"Now I'm sick," he thought. "I should have preferred to be nearer my chair, the transition would have been easier."

"Always these emotional digressions," said someone else, apparently his Opponent who played so well. "If the strange woman carried him away, she was able to do so because you could not hold your son. You preferred to be comfortable, you do even yet. In order not to have to experience the depths of life, you have always reassured yourself with stories of your early exit."

"What ought I to do?" asked General von Lambart.

"Take responsibility for your child. She has done it."

"And because of that she looks beautiful today."

"And you? She knows, at least, why she has worn herself out under your very eyes, in this very house with you. A woman came in from the world, she had never been seen

before. But now she has made your son her own and a man into the bargain."

"He is no longer recognizable," the General conceded, "I might shake hands with him, but I wouldn't feel right about it."

"Naturally, but she always feels all right about it."

"Where does she get her power?" he wondered. "What is the secret of it? What front is she putting on now? Who advised her never to desist but to go through with it and never, never to desist?"

No answer was forthcoming to this question of the General's. He stooped over the chessboard, with his one good eye and the smoked monocle that hid the empty socket . . . trembling he made a move himself. At last his Opponent spoke.

"As if you did not know," he said, "that her strength lies in conscience, simply in that conscience which you did not have the strength to cling to. You would simply have gone off and left your child to its fate in this hardly habitable world."

"I know nothing about the world," he ventured. The Other agreed with him at once.

"Everyone says that," he said, "but there

are no such things as moral earthquakes nor are there any immutable powers above morality. Don't hark back to unknown powers. Whatever we may have done has its own name. Whatever we have become, we have wished to become. Whatever comes after us is our fault. It is the same cry as in God's primal time, 'Repent.'"

"My cramps are coming back again. It's dreadful. I'm a poor wretch. I don't know why I've lived or why I'm dying now."

At this point General Veit Vogel von Lambart observed that his Opponent had won the game, that it was all over.

During the evening there was a knock at the door which connected Mary's room with the next. It was barely audible. Not until she put her ear to the door did she understand what was being whispered through it. "I can't move the heavy case away or I'd come in," said a voice, "if I do they'll hear it. If I go through the hall they'll hear that, too. But wait till tomorrow when they're all downstairs. Will you wait for me?"

About ten o'clock in the morning the first signs of life appeared in the house. Later it

grew still again. Someone came into Mary's room. It was the Princess. "He's coming and we have a car," she called radiantly from the door. With these two announcements, she flung herself into Mary's arms.

"You love him, too, that's why I like you," said the girl.

"I love you, too," Mary said.

"Then I can tell you everything?" the youngster asked quickly.

"Why not?" Mary said. "Since we both love him. Is it something about him?"

"Yes, and about the roadster. The President has sent me a roadster. It's our wedding present. They're all standing around it in the yard, but nobody can drive it. I can, of course."

"And Valentine?"

"You know he can, he's won auto races."

"Oh, that's right, too. And suppose he comes down now?"

"The President will come with him. There's still time."

"Until Sunday. Today is Friday."

"It's no distance at all to Berlin and back."

"With him?"

"No, with the President. I love him so."

"The President?"

"No, him."

Mary saw that a conversation with the Princess was like a badly driven automobile. She said finally, "You have three thoughts, my child, Valentine, the roadster and the President."

"I'm certainly going to shock you now, Baroness Hartmann," said the Princess.

"Not very easily," said Mary.

"Does Valentine love me?" the Princess asked. "You know what I mean. Does he really love me, really?"

"You want to know how much you mean to him," Mary said, and as the Princess stood there with her mouth open, she added, "How much he lets you please him."

Suddenly the little thing clapped her hands, the shining little teeth appeared and her mobile face became jubilant. "How clever you are," she cried; she was on her long legs again, and had kissed Mary once more. Then she said with perfect seriousness, "The roadster can go one hundred and fifty miles an hour."

"That's quite enough," said Mary, "but what about Valentine?"

"Nothing at all about him. He isn't coming now." The Princess frolicked for joy on

top of a piece of furniture that was never intended for such treatment, a commode. Her long bare legs dangled in the air while she drooped her head. In that attitude she said, "I'm going after my Valentine. With the President. To Berlin. We start tomorrow night."

"But why with him?" Mary asked without any sign of surprise.

The Princess sat down. "You ought to be able to guess that," she said, speaking from her perch on the commode. "The President has money. He's got to give it to me. That's what I'm marrying him for. He never gives me any peace. But afterwards I'm going to my Valentine in my roadster."

"At one hundred and fifty miles an hour," Mary added. "If only you're able to find him when you do, my child," she said.

"With all that money!" The Princess was annoyed now herself.

"You've heard too much talk of money, my child," Mary said. "Come here."

The Princess did not go to her at once and Mary had a chance to observe her. There she stood, a creature spiritually awakened by love. And her first thought was—money. "That's

the sort of creature we are," thought Mary. "That's what we make of ourselves. Roadster and President. You don't have to be hounded as I was to have the same fine notions. You do it from love. Love has awakened you, my poor child, make the most of it!"

Then she embraced the girl who suddenly started towards her, while her face, streaming with tears, lay between Mary's hands. "Will Valentine be cross to me?" she asked piteously. "He was that way to me just recently, that's why I haven't said anything to him yet."

"Don't say anything," Mary advised. "Misunderstandings grow out of trifles," she predicted, though without sarcasm. She was not thinking of a bitter joke, she was really anxious about this child . . . even about this second child. The two of them might lose one another for did he really have a heart one could be sure of? Judging by the life he had led her during the time of her aberrations, Mary doubted whether he had. At that moment she wished that Valentine might never come back. . . . Numbed with pain, the two of them lingered there, Mary and the young girl.

Then Mary drew a deep breath. "I know

you both," she said smiling. "How like one another you are."

"We both dance so well," the Princess said.

"That's it," Mary said. "You will both drive together at a hundred and fifty miles an hour. But leave the President, you have only one another. The President is old, but he's determined not to give you up yet. But don't let him be a drag on your future. That must belong to you alone."

She noticed that the young Princess was no longer able to express her own ideas. She herself had been clumsy in expressing what she thought, perhaps. She felt without words: "You're like each other. You are as near and dear to me as he is. I no longer love him alone . . . but both of you together, that's the object of our love, loving both alike. Otherwise I'd be what the President is. . . . Don't ruin my happiness, don't lose each other. . . ."

She took that thoughtless head between her hands and looked into the girl's face and said, "In spite of all you'll have to go through."

"What do you mean?" the girl asked. "What is going to happen to us?" As Mary kept silent, she went on. "You've been through

life, tell me about it. You know everything."

"I know everything by now," Mary said and told her not exactly what had happened to her, or just what dangers might threaten others, but rather what she hoped for the children. She only mentioned extraneous dangers. The dangers in themselves she passed over entirely. She felt free and self-mastered. She saw her own life fantastically reflected in those blue eyes trying so hard to understand. She was coming at last to believe that she had wished everything as it was and had only accidentally tried to have it otherwise. But the children would manage better.

The servant had to call them to dinner, which both of them had forgotten. In the hurry, while she was helping the Princess cool her flushed face, Mary said again, "The President must not notice anything." She spoke rapidly, but impressively. "He must not see that we have a secret understanding. He must go on believing that you want to elope with him. Is that clear? But don't go away with him."

"I'll fool him," the Princess exclaimed joyfully.

"That's what we must do," Mary said.

About noon on Saturday the President's car drove into the courtyard by the back way. His private secretary stepped out first and helped him down assiduously. The President was a bundle of energy. There was no doubt but that he had on the expression that he usually wore when putting over something big. The General, his former associate, recognized that expression. "See," he thought, "all the skin on his forehead is drawn towards the left temple. The wrinkles over his eyes are straight. They were just like that when he beat his strongest competitor, Kober."

Besides, the President did not take off his coat even for a moment. And so soon after dinner he was asking for wine.

Valentine kissed Mary's hand and immediately turned to his fiancée. It was not until dinner that he really took a good look at Mary . . . for he was afraid of her. A moment later he felt better. He had feared to find her the same old temptress. The woman he had just looked at would never try to tempt anyone. Valentine had to talk, drink and look into his fiancée's eyes at the table, but he had only one thought in his head: "Where had the Baroness been?" He did not dare to ask her.

"She looks quite old now," he thought. "The change was sudden." Then he realized how long she had resisted this change. All that he had demanded from her ever since they had known one another had been hard, had been too much. Finally she had fled from him. And now this was what had happened to her. Valentine cast down his eyes, he was sorry.

She had come to him and offered to be his mother and what had he made of her instead? His victim, practically. And she had been so beautiful! Valentine thought that however unpardonable it might have been, it would have been quite conceivable, if, in the course of all the strange things that had happened to them, he had fallen in love with her. Had he perhaps? When they met today he had still been afraid that it might happen. Now that he had looked at her, he was almost ready to believe that the whole affair had never existed . . . at least not for her. It was he alone who had had an unwholesome dream. It was he who had been the tempter, after all, he in his role as a vainglorious man. "Poor Felicie," he thought, "if anything of all this is real, then the really terrible things have happened to you. But young or old, you are more beautiful

now than ever. Where did you come from?"

He thought all this during his mechanical conversation with the Princess about the new roadster. Meanwhile the President's frown was fixed unremittingly on the Princess. His eyes remained concealed under their heavy overhanging brows. Suddenly he drank a toast to the General's wife, which immediately made the General wary. Something was wrong. The General had only a vague impression of what the Professor was saying to him. He spoke for a long time without receiving any reply. At last the Professor, too, became conscious of the suspense which pervaded the room, and he also grew silent. After a pause, the General's wife remarked aloud that the weather had changed.

The window curtains fluttered into the room and the air became suddenly oppressive. It grew increasingly dark as though evening had prematurely arrived. All of them, including the General and the President, had left the table. From the terrace they could watch the heavy mass of water that seemed to roll all in one swell. There were no combers on it. The sagging sky was still silent. Sea-gulls swooped suddenly down. A few sails were vis-

ible. "There won't be many fireworks tonight," the General observed.

"On the contrary," Valentine said, "the heavens themselves will soon provide them."

Valentine and the Princess were standing together. They did not touch one another as both of them looked out into the distance. But they were obviously a well-matched couple. It was undeniable that their heads resembled one another, that they had the same figures and that their fingers widened out and grew slender again at the same places. Every muscle in their bodies expressed courage and assurance, which was the secret of their grace. "Oh, they'll be tall and slender for a little while yet," thought the General, hazily reminded of his own youth and good times.

The General's wife, too, recalled a garden of long ago, with care-free sisters and a game of croquet in the sunshine. She gritted her teeth and left the terrace.

Mary remained alone in front of the two charming figures though they were not standing together there for her sake. Instead they seemed to have walked self-sufficiently through the little cell in which, in memory, Mary was once more kneeling. Then they

passed through the window and over airy steps into the Unknown. At that moment Valentine looked around at her and found her eyes completely unresponsive.

From the beginning he had grown accustomed to having her eyes watch him darkly and blankly, like those of an animal. Later those eyes had begun to smile. One after the other, Mary's eyes had revealed brightness and disquiet, savage joy and grief. And now that everything was at an end, her eyes were vacant again, but this time for good and all. Valentine was afraid for her. Her eyes were too sunk, their gaze seemed to come from a great distance. Sometimes they looked strangely at him. To Valentine her eyes had often seemed too fixed and unapproachable . . . as if everything about her, even the other features of her face, were no longer of any consequence to her. This frightened Valentine. Spoilt as he had been by that face, he found the expression in it so changed that it hardly seemed to recognize him.

Mary's lips were pressed lightly together while shadowy hollows in her ripe skin ran downwards from the corners of her mouth. Whom did those compressed lips kiss now?

Not Valentine, and they never would again. He realized it with a pang. At the same time he felt himself moved by something solemn.

He was still questioning himself when suddenly music sounded, faint tones as though from a distance. This was enough for the Princess. She immediately raised her arms for Valentine and, without having spoken to Mary he put his arms around the girl. They began to dance.

The voices in the dining-room rose higher. The Professor and the President were engaged in a discussion behind the windows that opened on the terrace. The philosopher was defending private property and the captain of industry was attacking him. "After me, the deluge," he declared. Nothing could endure forever, not even his own commercial interests. Out of his despair at the threatened loss of the Princess, he was beginning to question his own power and prerogatives.

"The Communists alone are on the right road," he declared, "for nature is on their side. . . ." The oppressive air enveloped him and made him sigh. Suddenly he turned his head towards the dancing couple. If they had unexpectedly danced off the terrace, the Pres-

ident would have bounded through the window in the middle of a sentence. All the while he was talking he was thinking only of the pair of dancers.

Flushed with the heat, the Professor was maintaining that the desire for possessions is as deeply rooted in mankind as the desire for love. But most people are without possessions, the President countered, and yet they never make any particular effort to change their condition.

"That merely proves them to be a little less than human," the Professor replied.

"The vast majority?" the President asked. "That's as good as saying everybody." The Professor did not dispute this.

"You won't deny the urge to love, though?" he said. "No one denies it. But if you yourself could see how very few really possess or exercise that instinct in any marked degree you would be amazed. The vast majority of human beings are really genderless." He was trying to torture himself for having awakened the Princess with the passion of his soul, for having first aroused her and then let her go. Someone else who had done absolutely nothing for the Princess was to possess her, his

masterpiece . . . was to be loved by another.

The Professor had reached the conclusion that he should have acted on his own behalf. This had been the one opportunity in his life to be happy without shame or regret. No man of strong nature would have given it up, but he had been too much of a weakling. And he meant to settle accounts with himself in full view of that couple, who had been dancing on the terrace and had disappeared. The Professor could hardly degrade the human race enough in his desire for vengeance on himself. As his spirit warmed up, his eyes began to glow, unbridled like a wild beast's.

"The world is only for such as those two lords of life," he persisted stubbornly. "The world of riches, too. People, like you, President, deserve a kind of credit hard to compute. You steady the wavering laws of nature. And in that I'm with you. We two broad-shouldered men!" he cried.

"Broad-shouldered!" the President said frowning. "Why, you're practically humpbacked." He pushed the chair away from him violently and stumbled across the room, his lame foot making even more noise than usual. "How much do you think the Princess' bridal

dress cost?" he called back. "Exactly ten times as much as you paid for it, you helpless fool."

At this the Professor drew down his head between his shoulder blades, which were unquestionably too high. His eyes were timid and humble and his mind collapsed under him like an overturned ladder. There he lay. The President suddenly went past him, clop, clop. He wanted to jump through the window with one bound, but he finally limped back. He cursed and at last dragged himself out of the room.

The Professor clutched his head between his frail hands. "I never see what life really is," he said. "My Princess wears a dress for which I did not pay while I simply go on talking. That's how my life has gone."

The President saw nothing much either. The dancing couple had disappeared. Filled with rage, he limped over to Baroness Hartmann.

"Where have they gone?" he demanded threateningly.

"Stay where you are," said Mary. "You're limping, Seehase."

He gritted his teeth. "You say that because

you've changed your colors and are doing business for my rival now," he said. "I began to distrust you some time ago. They'd better watch out."

"That's understood," Mary answered, "Whoever opposes you had better be prepared for anything. His best chance is that you'll suffer a stroke."

She said this in the matter of fact tone which was perfectly natural between them. Words of a different sort would have belied the actions which they expected of one another. Any change in tone or manner would only have made the President extremely suspicious. Mary did not reveal her new character to him. Or was she revealing it? In that case he did not recognize it. All that he could see was that she was laughing at him. The possibility of danger from his rage only added to her amusement. She felt that she would settle accounts with him only if she played against him. The actualities of life, incarnated in the President, were really like a game. If you can't avoid them altogether, win according to the rules of the game, she thought. The consequences all come afterwards anyhow.

The President shifted impatiently from side

to side. "I'm hardened against everything. I'm walking over corpses," he muttered. She looked at him. Did he mean his own as well? Mary, incidentally, did not lay much store by his sickness. She even suspected the present towering rage. "Comedian," she said. . . .

"Where are the young people?" he demanded still more threateningly.

"They were both in the water long ago," Mary replied. "If you hadn't stopped here to talk with me, you'd have met them. Now they must both be swimming far out," she pointed off in the distance. "Are you a good swimmer, Seehase?"

He stared out at the sea but saw nothing because there was nothing there. Then he took out his watch; for decisions of this sort he usually allowed himself a quarter of a minute. He left with a last penetrating glance at Mary who stood watching him amused. That moment told him that he had been utterly deceived. The next moment, however, he was gone. He waded through the soft sand which yielded like the ground we try to hurry over in a dream. Mary only waited to see him come out of the bath house and plop into the water. Then she went up to her room.

She watched at her window. The young people were again on the terrace. They were astonished to see the President struggling on and on against the wind and waves. Now and again the General and his wife wandered singly through the darkened rooms without encountering one another.

The General's wife was facing a final decision and it left her no peace. The General had learned from his friend that the Princess' gown had been paid for by the President. Suspicious little details multiplied. The General felt some hidden unhealthiness pressing swiftly on them from all sides. It was only a question of moments before something would happen. He had pretty definite suspicions though he avoided thinking them through out of deference to his wife. He was even sorry that he had finally opened his eyes since everything pointed to his wife as the instigator. Besides, the strain on his sick body was enormous.

The President did not come ashore till it was dark. His chauffeur went out to him in a boat. The President was exhausted. His chauffeur chafed his wrists. But his first thought concerned the young people. At that moment

a flash of light exploded in the darkened sky. The fireworks! On the beach were the happy young people. Youth did not care even for a President. The General's wife had warned him, "You are expecting the most you can ever hope for." But the President could do no more than go on to meet his destiny. He did it in his automobile while the lowering sky looked as if it would burst at any moment.

Mary stayed in the house. She was watching in her room and making plans. The Professor sat troubled in a corner, the General's wife and the General took turns at going through the darkened rooms. Fireworks crackled in the distance, but the first streak of lightning was blinding. The big living room was filled with a ghostly blue light as husband and wife suddenly found themselves face to face.

"What is going on here?" the General shouted into the storm just as the first thunder pealed.

"We are ruined," she answered bitterly, while it grew still as death.

"Aren't we dishonored too?" he asked. She shrugged her shoulders and he realized at once that he was no longer speaking to one of his

own kind. He had never dreamed that it was as bad as this.

"What are we living on?" he demanded in a voice that she did not recognize. Frightened, she stammered something incomprehensible. A flash of lightning showed the General that her gray, dishevelled hair was falling down over her face and that she was bending forwards, her mouth puckered, on the verge of tears.

"What do you want from the President?" he demanded relentlessly. He did not hear what she answered for the rain was rattling down like bullets on the terrace. They saw one another only as two frightful shadows. Neither wanted to turn on the light. One shadow moved forward threateningly. The other shrieked.

"And suppose it's so!" she cried. "His money is stolen money. He has robbed us. Let him pay for the Princess."

They remained motionless while the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled around them. At last the General mastered himself. "But the greatest wrong of all concerns that woman upstairs," he said. He spoke in a muffled voice. "Look at her. Look at what has

become of her because of us. We have played on the aberration of a poor woman." To his surprise his own words told him that he had had a hand in it, too. He wondered at it.

After a while, as the rain rattled around them, he added, "We ought not to have let her stay with us a single day."

"Say that again!" she shrieked . . . and passed from rage to a laughter that did not end while it lightened and thundered outside. The lightning revealed to the General an insane face, one so strange that it left him nothing more to say.

"For who has been deceived?" she burst out. "We! Who has the more right to consider himself a victim? We! Don't you know that we are deeper in debt now than we ever were before she came to us with her money?"

The General's wife did not deny that the money had been extorted from the Baroness Hartmann, though it had been charged back to them by Kappus. She revealed the story of the house they were living in. She did not color anything and the telling of the naked truth brought her back to a sense of reality. The danger of her going insane lessened.

"The house is a cheap sort of a wedding

present," she said distinctly through the driving rain. She even turned on the light now. "And she's living here herself. The adventuress . . . she didn't let it cost her anything to get among respectable people. All she had to do was to play on our inexperience. If only we had held to our principles," she said this time . . . instead of the General.

Suddenly she began to lose her head again. "The criminals!" she cried. "I'll force them yet to disgorge their plunder. I'll forget my delicacy. It won't be easy, but I'll do it."

It was in this way that the General's wife prepared her triumphant exit. In going, she looked around carefully to see if anyone might have overheard her. The Baroness Hartmann was probably upstairs, but the loudest cry could hardly have reached her through the noise of the storm.

"What's the use of crying anyhow?" the General's wife thought. "How degrading! Now everything must be done . . . coldly and carefully."

At first she did not think to look for the Professor sitting unnoticed in his corner. It was far more important that both the young people and the President were somewhere out-

side. . . . Owing to the light which she had turned on in the room, the General's wife could not see that the Princess who had indeed been outside, was now hiding on the terrace.

The Princess had not listened at all, however. She was not in the least curious about the scene inside. She had something more pressing in hand herself. Besides, she was soaked through. She sheltered herself against the wall of the house although it afforded her little protection from the elements. She was waiting impatiently until the room should be empty. But the General was still in it.

The General had not moved from one spot. He was standing in the rain water which had come through the open door. What things would he now have to force himself to forget if he was to go on living here! He thought it would be far better not to go on. . . . But a sense of duty urging him to watch over and to save what was still to be saved kept him alive. He went out of the room.

Instantly the Princess ran through the room and up the stairs. But light as her steps were, the General's wife heard them. She also heard how the Princess in her confusion had gone to the wrong door and was trying to open the

Baroness Hartmann's. It was locked, so she went to her own room.

Mary was standing in front of her as she opened the door. "Good," she said, "you can let that wet cloak drip in here and not in my room, please. Now give it to me and go into my room." Then the Princess noticed that the connecting door had been opened and that the chest had been moved aside. She wanted to ask questions and she wanted to tell something.

"I know," Mary said, "the President gave you something to drink. You look as though he had mixed something in it. Lie down now and go to sleep."

"I jumped out of his car," the Princess said. "How did I get here? Valentine lost me in the excitement. The auto was going at full speed when I jumped."

"I know," Mary said again. "Go into my room, quick. And remember—no lights."

Left alone in the Princess' room she obstructed the door again. She put out her own lights, too. She listened. A machine drew up behind the house. Intruding steps sounded on the floor below.

The President and his chauffeur were

stopped at the foot of the stairs by the General's wife.

"Where are you going?" the General's wife asked so directly that they stopped. "Get out!" she commanded. The chauffeur was already slinking off. Everything was said cautiously in a muffled tone since none of them wanted the General to arrive on the scene.

"You can't go up, Seehase," she said with cold decision. To herself she said, "Courage, I am no longer a Schollendorff." Aloud, but not too loud for fear of the General she added, "Unless you pay me first."

"You!" the President said. "Why you? Haven't you already fleeced Baroness Hartmann? Where is all that money gone to? You're a busted concern." He gibed at her, but not too loudly. Both of them were trying to cover their fear with a threatening tone, as though they could hardly control themselves.

"Quick, the check!" the General's wife threatened. "You'll pay me now for all those who have robbed me."

"I trust you'll forego the interest," he said in exactly the same tone.

"You don't understand yet, Seehase," she

said, "but you're not going to get upstairs. You won't get out of this business easily, either."

"Go ahead, shoot me," he said, spreading open his arms. For two steps above him she was holding one hand behind her back. There was no telling what was in it. Then she exposed it and it was empty. He immediately showed the utmost contempt for her.

"I suppose you thought I was afraid," he said. "I've got far beyond all that as you're going to see now." He took a step forward, determined to reach the Princess even if the stairs were red hot. At the same time he kept one hand pressed over his heart so that the General's wife might see that even a heart attack did not daunt him.

For her part, she was conscious of her gray dishevelled hair, over a face which had grown terribly fixed and in which the eyes shone with unnatural brilliance. "He won't dare," she thought in desperation, but he had already started up. They watched one another for a moment appraisingly, each with his ironical smile. . . . Then each began to threaten the other again.

"Are you going to pay?" the General's wife demanded.

"Do you want to make the acquaintance of the inside of a jail?" he asked.

"I might after you," she said, but she thought: "It's impossible, it's absolutely impossible. I'm not like them." With the same breath she was saying, "I'll make you powerless, Seehase. I'll force you to use violence yet. Don't you see what I want? One way or another you're done for."

Suddenly his eyes snapped open. She was frightened. "I can afford to do many things," he said, "after that, let them come for me."

"Do you think you can escape?" she asked.

"I was never happy," he said, "but I want one thing and I need only a minute to get it, no more."

"But afterwards? You'll be caught."

"Not by you." He was pressing his hand against his heart. His body stiffened as though to resist for these few vital minutes the attack of his strongest assailant, his heart. "No one will get me then," he said.

"What?" Shaken with fear, she bent for-

ward. The man was dying! He could do what he wanted without fear of punishment, he did not have to pay her for that privilege. He could simply die. The General's wife fell against the banister and the way stood clear. The President strode past her. Half way up, he called in a muffled voice for his chauffeur, who slunk up after him. They took some time finding the right door . . .

The General's wife, crumpled up against the banister, realized that everything was over with her. She was despondent. "From step to step," she thought sadly, though with a sense of final tranquillity; life, which apparently had wanted nothing else, might at least be satisfied with her downfall. Suddenly in the dark space behind the stair light, she saw a shadowy woman appear, a well-dressed woman whose face was untroubled by catastrophe, although she was surrounded with misfortune. This woman had always said that misfortune was not defeat. A sense of misfortune comes only through our own fault. "One doesn't grow stronger merely by having no ethics," the woman said. "Misfortune actually made me better." She had already disappeared, but at that moment the General's

wife recognized her. That was what she herself ought to have been. . . .

The General's wife left the steps, tottering like an old woman. "Go into your little room," she thought, "Ina, my child. The President is dying and won't pay. But you'll remain what you are now. Go into your little room, Ina, my poor child, and if you can, weep."

Mary in the Princess' room heard the footsteps she expected. She lay on the bed wrapped up to her eyes in the Princess' wet cloak. Her one anxiety was that the ruse she was planning should succeed. For a moment she thought that she was making herself ridiculous. But then she thought, "Who am I? It doesn't matter now." The President in his rage might manhandle her. "Who, me?" she thought, "an old woman who laughs at him?" The door opened and two shadows glided in. They covered her head and lifted her.

A moment later Valentine came home. The living-room was empty. He called his fiancée, then Mary. He even called the General's wife, but no one answered. He went further into the house and the General came towards him. "Be careful, young man," he said without any preliminaries, but Valentine under-

stood. He had felt it already. With every step he took he felt the house grow more ominous around him. "What is it?" he asked briefly.

"I was locked in," the General replied, "I don't know by whom. In the meantime they did you an ill turn. That was why they had to lock me in first." He laid his hand on Valentine's shoulder. They looked each other fixedly in the eyes. Then Valentine's eyes smiled at his father. "Thanks, Father," he said.

Valentine walked out quickly. The Professor ran towards him from the stairway and fell on his knees in front of him. He embraced Valentine's knees. "The Princess," he sobbed. He could not say anything for some time. Then he added hoarsely, "She's gone." Valentine heard a noise in the courtyard.

"Let me go," he ordered, but the Professor could not understand him. He was too deeply immersed in his own disaster. The Princess was gone and he ascribed the whole catastrophe to his own criminal desires. He had no philosophy now, his optimism needed quietude. The Professor was lost in calamity.

"Forgive me," the Professor groaned, pressing Valentine's knees together so tightly that he was unable to move. Outside Valentine

could hear the automobile driving away. "Kindly let me go," he said. "Help me," groaned the Professor.

For answer he received a blow on the jaw that keeled him completely over. Valentine was already outside. Too late, the abductor's machine was humming a long way off through the rain. Valentine had to walk to the nearest hotel to get out his new roadster, a gift from the President himself. If their garage had been longer, the roadster could have stayed there, but it would certainly have been ruined by the rain if it had been kept there as it was.

"Better late than never," Valentine thought gloomily. When he had finally started, his two headlights showed him only an empty street and he could hear nothing but the rain.

He drove hour after hour. His speedometer showed successively seventy, eighty, ninety. The automobile vibrated with the speed. Forests began and ended as quickly as if they had been bushes. Houses disappeared the moment the headlight had revealed them. Valentine no longer knew through what places he was driving, but he did not lose his sense of direction. In his mind's eye he saw the Princess in danger. He must not come too late. Also

he must not break his neck before he reached his destination. "That would simply be playing into the scoundrel's hands," he thought.

Once he heard the humming of another automobile. At the same time he saw the other machine like a shadow at a turning. He even recognized the figures in it, but when he took the same turn himself there was nothing to be seen. He was mistaken. Overexertion and the terrific speed he was maintaining were playing havoc with his nerves so that they were losing their sureness. "Take care, don't overtax yourself now," he thought, "you'll need all your strength later on when you get there."

Day was beginning to break when he reached Berlin. Platz am Knie stood wet and deserted. The President's house which had seemed like a tank to the General's wife, was locked up tight. Behind the first metal door, Valentine knew there were more doors, compartments and traps . . . he would not attempt a forced entrance at first.

He rang a bell and talked with the watchman who spoke through an invisible opening. He was finally admitted. The President must have urgent business afoot to call his private secretary so late at night from such a distance.

The watchman could understand that. He added that the President's automobile had been splashed with mud, too. The woman in it was unconscious.

Valentine went up to the high-perched room where lived the lord of this fortress. From the ante-room he could see all its magnificence dazzlingly lit up. The door of the spacious office was wide open. Valentine listened attentively as he hurried over the rugs. He had an impression of confusion and deathly silence.

The President sat behind his desk which was as wide as a dance floor. In his hand, which was dangling, he held a revolver. He had seized the weapon at the approach of his enemy, but at the same moment he was prevented from using it, by a stroke that forced him to crumple up in his chair. He was deathly pale and labored for breath. Apparently he was dying.

Valentine tore the revolver out of his hand and placed the muzzle against his corpse-like body. The body began to stir at once. "I'm dying," the President said, as though with his last breath.

"The Princess," Valentine demanded. The

electric light had not been turned on, but day was breaking. On the huge sofa he recognized his beloved's form, still closely wrapped in the wet cloak which hid her face. One hand protruded from the cloak. He had a moment of terrible anxiety. The hand was warm. Saved, everything was saved! She was breathing quietly in her sleep.

Valentine turned back to the scoundrel behind his smooth dance floor of a desk. The culprit was holding a piece of paper in his trembling fingers. "Read it, Valentine," he said, "just read it." Valentine read it. It was the President's will and he was leaving everything to the Princess. "And I'll be dead soon," he said. He writhed painfully. Valentine looked at him and tore the paper to pieces.

"Imbecile," the President said, suddenly stronger, "that was your chance. What have you against me?" he demanded plaintively. Was he losing his mind in his fear of death?

"That you're still here," Valentine answered. "You promised to die."

"I'll simply make the same will over and over again," the President answered.

"I despise your money," Valentine said, loudly and joyfully.

"But you'll have to accept it. I'll force you to accept it. You can't exist without me, without having me at hand."

It was his last piece of subtility, his last stroke of business. The young man declined it a dozen times haughtily, but the old one persisted stubbornly. "Accept it for the sake of her whom we both love," he pleaded piteously.

Valentine finally turned his back on him and, as he did so, the President's big body slumped down. He slipped out of his chair and lay under the desk, looking small against its massiveness. The eyes that had had such a terrifying effect were closed.

Was he dead at last? Valentine turned away helplessly. But in the darkened doorway Mary was standing.

"Don't be too hard on him, my son," she said, "he is repentant."

"I'm afraid that it's all over with him," Valentine said.

"No," she said, "I've long had a suspicion that his heart trouble was not exactly genuine. It's really hysteria, the punishment of the insatiable. But he wants to turn everything he has over to you."

"Yes, in order to keep us in his power as long as he lives."

"Of course, he has some evil motive," she said. "Where is his kind to find any good ones? But the action in itself is good and might have got some foothold in his soul and changed him entirely. He might have learned renunciation. For all I know a new life may be beginning in him as he lies there," she said.

"Believe me," she went on, "it will result in some improvement for him. His motives may be questionable, but his personal improvement is unquestionable. She looked at him and said, "I'm proud of you."

But she saw that he was growing constantly more restless and let him go. "Look for the Princess," she said. "Can't you find her? Well, she's sleeping safe at home in her own bed."

Then he understood how it had all worked out. He bent his head over her hands. "You have done this for me, too," he said. "I haven't said a word to you yet, for what I have to say is too much. My thanks can never be spoken. Do you remember when at first I felt nothing more than pity for the Princess? Though I had as much need for it as she did. Now I love

my bride and I need no props to hold me up. I can face a good deal myself."

"Then I have become unnecessary," Mary said with joy in her voice. "I can go my own way in peace again. I'll confess to you, I've sold my house." She hesitated. "There's nothing left to keep me now. I'm going to travel. This is the last time we shall see one another." There was a trace of anxiety in her voice.

"No, stay here. Why don't you stay?" he said.

He stretched out his arms but he saw her altered face and the eyes that no longer cared to see anything that went on around them. . . .

"We would love you so much," he whispered, and added still more softly, as though he did not dare to say it any more, "Mother."

Faint as it had been she cut him short.

"All that is over with," she said, "I know now that I was mistaken, but it has meant happiness to us, our supreme happiness. You are not my son. But you are the son of my heart. Don't feel sad about it, Valentine."

For he was staring down, he even dropped a tear, a silent tribute to his lost illusions. But

they had already vanished, he did not know how or when. His belief in the authenticity of his strange mother had left him and while he was sorry, he really felt relieved. Young Valentine no longer thought of the past and its struggles and of all that their two hearts had been through together. Mary vanished from him like a cloud which had once borne a human face.

But while he was staring down her eyes had lost themselves gazing at him, resting on him ecstatically. At that moment, she no longer believed that she had been mistaken, had struggled, sinned and repented. Once more Mary saw her child as though before the beginning of its life, the moment of its birth. "He belongs to you," she thought. Birth and the beginning of life had hardly interrupted eternity. Valentine gazed into those eyes when he looked up.

The telephone rang. Valentine walked over to the desk. It was the Princess. She told him how Mary had helped her. She was saved, only she wanted to make sure that he was safe, too. She called him to her as though he had simply to walk in her door. She spoke to him as if she were lying on his breast. In

the end she wanted to speak to Mary. "Call her," she said.

"Directly," said Valentine. But Mary was no longer there. He went into the next room and the next . . . without calling her for he no longer knew by what name to call her by. At last he reached the ante-room. She was not there either. He leaned over the banister. No door was closing behind her.

"She has gone," he told the Princess.

"Come home," she replied.

Valentine breathed more heavily, he could hardly speak. He suddenly felt that a matchless strength had abandoned him and that with all his courage he would henceforth have just enough to carry him through.

"Come," said the Princess.

"I'm coming," Valentine called back.

THE END

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